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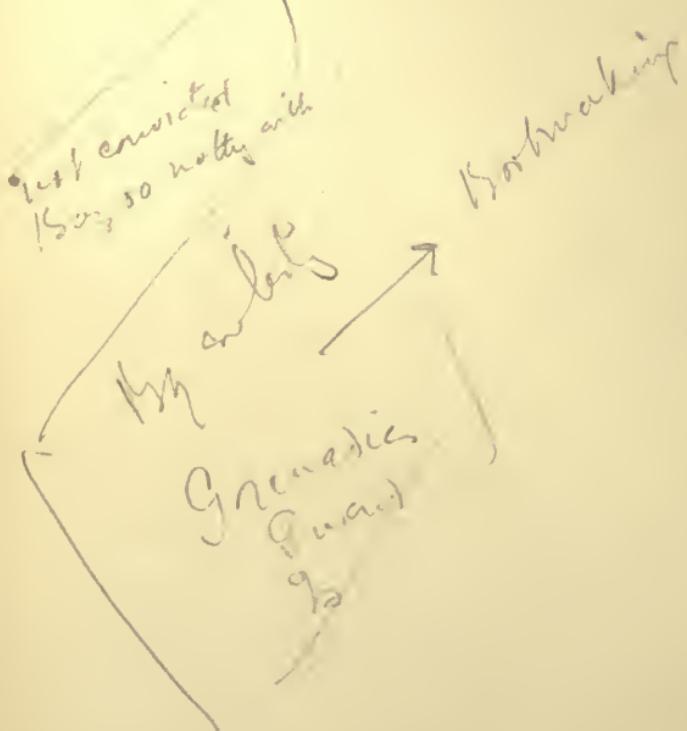
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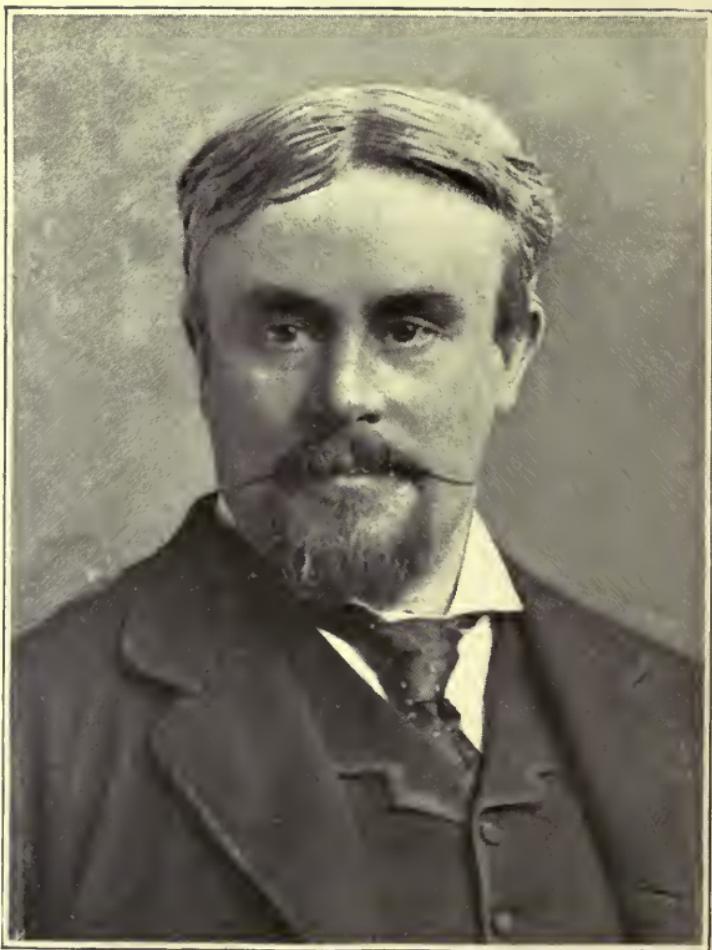
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NUMBER TWENTY

FABLES AND FANTASIES

BY

H. D. TRAILL

LONDON :

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NOTE.

THE story which gives the title to this volume was written specially for it.

Of the prose pieces which follow, two, "The Protectorate of Porcolongu" and "The Great Baxtairs Scandal," originally appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine*; a third, "The Brutes on Their Master," in the *Nineteenth Century*; and the last, "The Armourer of the Twentieth Legion," in the *Universal Review*. The detached pieces of verse were contributed, two of them to the *Saturday Review*, and the two others to the *Daily Telegraph*. It was in the pages of *Punch* that the Baby was first allowed to record its poetic protest against the teachings of the Nurse.

The Author takes this opportunity of thanking the proprietors of these periodicals for the permission to reprint.

H. D. T.

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NUMBER TWENTY.

PROLOGUE.

IT was exactly half-past eleven p.m. on the 31st of December, 1900, and Old Seekleham lay a-dying. Obviously he had no more than half an hour at the outside to live, yet so tough was his vitality that no one doubted but that he would manage to hold out that length of time. His end could not be described as unexpected. On the contrary, it had been foretold by the almanac makers for many years, and its precise date had even been fixed by them with an accuracy in which too many of their other predictions were wanting.

Old Seekleham himself was fully prepared for his departure, not to say disposed to welcome it. It was not that he had attained to a greater age than his ancestors, who, in fact, had all been centenarians like himself; it was that his life, as measured by exciting and consequently fatiguing experiences, had already far exceeded most of theirs. He had lived very hard in many ways. His early youth had been of a singularly stormy kind. He was the most pugnacious of boys—a fighter such as never before was seen;

and, indeed, he had enriched his record with one of the most desperate “mills” in all history before completing his fifteenth year.

After reaching middle age, he had entered upon a most successful career as a trader; and during the last third of his life his achievements as an explorer, an inventor, and a scientific investigator had been of the most brilliant order. But of late years he had been suffering severely from the malady known as “having-had-enough-of-it.”

He grumbled at the magnitude of the wealth he had acquired by trade; he grumbled at the extent of territory he had opened up to commerce; he grumbled at the result of his inventions and the fruits of his scientific inquiries. In his desponding moods, which became more and more frequent in his closing years, he would declare that he was far happier before he had made so much money, or had pushed his business to such an extent that its incessant calls on his attention left him with scarce a moment to himself. His inventive skill he got at last to hold in the lightest possible esteem; while of his science he was wont to remark, with what he intended for irony, that it had revealed to him almost everything except what he most wanted to discover, and what alone he cared to know. To that he was no nearer, he would add with bitterness, than the most remote of his ancestors.

On the whole, therefore, Old Seekleham was not sorry to be going.



The hands of the World Clock in the Vestibule of Eternity, where lay the couch of the Moribund, pointed to

thirty-four minutes past eleven. A shadow fell across his bed, and he opened his eyes.

A tall, spare figure stood before him—the figure of an old, old man, of a man many times as old as Seekleham himself, white bearded, deeply wrinkled, and bald save for a single lock of hair depending from his forehead. He leaned upon a scythe, and carried a wallet at his back. An hour-glass was in his left hand.

“Do you know me?” he said, in a voice full and resonant, and yet which seemed to bring with it an echo from afar.

“Not—that—pleasure,” faintly murmured Seekleham, who during the last fifty years of his life had been a model of refined politeness. “In the—the gardening line, I presume from your implement. Given up the mowing machine, apparently. . . . Is that—another instance—of my—my misdirected ingenuity—in the matter of inventions?”

The aged visitor returned no answer, but placed his hour-glass on the ground, and proceeded to disburden himself of the wallet.

“Houndsditch?” whispered Seekleham, more to himself than the other. “But, no!” he added, as his eye fell on the hour-glass, “a travelling pedlar more likely, with the last new thing in egg-boilers.”

“Is it possible that you know me not?” said the grey-beard, solemnly. “I am TIME!”

Seekleham looked at him for a few moments with an amused smile.

“Time!” he echoed. “You, Time? Nonsense!”

“Nonsense?” exclaimed his scandalised visitor.

“Excuse me. The ejaculation was rude, and I apologise. But really, really to hear an independent, a self-existent

entity like yourself—for you claim independence and self-existence, I suppose?"

"Rather!" replied the other complacently, "and a respectable antiquity, too: an existence of which 'the memory of man runneth not to the contrary.'"

"Exactly!" resumed Seekleham, his smile now giving place to a positive chuckle. "That's just it. It is all a matter of the 'memory of man' and nothing else. It was the memory of man, or in other words the continuity of man's mental impressions, which brought Time into being, and without it Time would cease to be. In point of fact, you would *be* it—if you were Time: but you must surely be aware that Time is merely a form of the subjective consciousness."

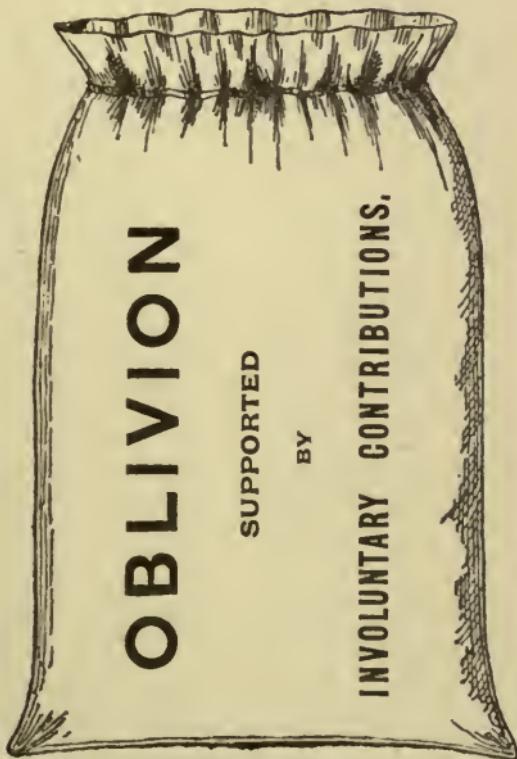
"Oh, indeed!" was the ironical reply. "Then I suppose you can 'gain' or 'lose' a form of the subjective consciousness, or 'save' or 'waste' it, or 'work against' it, or be 'tied to' it, or 'come up to' it. Or, perhaps" (with increasing contempt), "you can take a form of the subjective consciousness by the forelock."

"Mere figures of speech," said Seekleham, "mere conveniences of language. Nothing but man's incurable trick of personification. Why, Kant, before I was born——"

"Yes, and cant till the day of your death, apparently," interrupted Time, with an impatience which bordered on the discourteous. "Now, look here, if you imagine that I am worth so little that I can afford to waste myself in chopping metaphysics with an expiring century that has only about a quarter of an hour more to live, you were never more mistaken in all your hundred years of life. I have other fish to fry."

And, with that, he rose, and having tied his wallet, mouth open, to one of the brass knobs of the bed-foot, began to look round the chamber with an inquiring air.

Seekleham eyed him curiously, and then cast a glance at the bag. It was branded in large black letters running all along it like the name on a farmer's flour sack.



"Here! hi! hallo!" exclaimed the Moribund abruptly, as he saw Time removing two busts from the brackets on which they stood. "What are you doing with those? Are you aware that they are effigies of two of my most distinguished statesmen?"

"Quite aware," replied Time, coolly. "But I know what I am about; thank you for your kind interest in my work."

"Know what you are about! Yes, but *do* you? Let me tell you that I have preserved those two busts with the utmost reverence for a considerable part of my long life, and I should advise you to——"

"Seekleham," said Time brusquely, "in the course of the long life you seem so fond of talking about, you must have heard many proverbs—have you not?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well," resumed Time, with a blander air, "did you ever come across a proverb about grandmothers—and eggs—and the way to suck them—and the proper persons to give instruction in the art of—but, there! I see you have. Your eye is full of intelligence. Well, in this case, for 'grandmother' read 'grandfather to the power of *n*,' and observe the directions of the adage."

And as he spoke, he chucked the two distinguished statesmen unceremoniously into the wallet.

"Come," he continued, with a hasty glance at the hour-glass, "I have not many minutes to spare. Where are your poets, artists, men of letters, men of science? Point 'em out! point 'em out!"

His manner was so imperious as to abash all resistance. Seekleham could only mutter "Poets?" and point with a feeble finger at a line of busts on a shelf in the corner of the room, with one powerful and stately head overshadowing the rest.

Many of them Time swept into his sack without a moment's hesitation. A few he did not touch at all. One

or two he took up, and after scrutinising them for a few moments with a doubtful air, replaced them on the shelf.

"I will give them a little longer," he muttered. "I can always look in again, if necessary, in a few years' time."

Seekleham watched the operation in silence, until at last, seeing one particular statuette snatched roughly up with evident destination to the wallet, he could contain himself no longer.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "*He*, too! One of my most popular poets!"

"Smooth, isn't he?" said Time, with an ugly grin, as he passed a contemptuously caressing hand over its polished surface. "But look at him," he continued, holding up the bust between his finger and thumb; "why, if I were to handle him much longer, there would be nothing left of him."

And indeed, the popular poet already seemed to shrink and dwindle beneath the touch of Time, who, after spinning the statuette in the air as a boy spins a penny, flung it scornfully among the other alms for Oblivion. Then, to the utter amazement of Old Seekleham, he lifted from its shelf the stateliest bust of all.

"You—you are not going to—you cannot mean to—to—" stammered the expiring Century, his eye travelling with painful agitation from Time to the wallet and back again. The other, without noticing his disorder, stepped briskly with the bust to the open door of the Chamber.

Seekleham breathed again. "I see," he muttered, "I understand. A promotion."

"Of course," answered Time, returning empty-handed. "You must have expected *that*, I think. I have transferred your poet from the Ante-chamber to the Hall of Eternity, as

one whose place among the Immortals is assured. But let me tell you, sir, that it is the only promotion of the kind that I am in a position to make among any of your living children, and, indeed, the only one I have ever made since the batch of candidates I took it upon me to pass when you were still hardly out of your teens. All the others who have escaped the wallet for the present will have to wait here awhile yet before they can reckon on escaping it altogether. Yes, all of them, even *he*," pointing to a rugged, shock-headed, Scotch-looking bust that glowered at him from the rank ; "and *he*," indicating another—this also a massive-browed, yet, curiously enough, somewhat simian head—that stood beside it.

"What !" gasped Seekleham, "even my most famous man of science ? Even Dar——"

"Yes," replied Time, "I have said so. Even that distinguished 'scientist.' Don't you wish," he added, bending lower over the bed, "don't you wish you had expired before they disgraced your record by the invention of *that* word ?"

The other moaned feebly.

"They have put many such indignities upon me in my closing years," he murmured.

A short silence ensued. The sands in the hour-glass were fast running out ; the hands of the clock marked ten minutes to midnight. Time, softly humming to himself M. Jean Richepin's cheerful lyric, "*Encore un siècle qui décline*," continued to sweep the remnant of the literary, artistic, and other celebrities into his wallet.

It was with as much pleasure as, in his rapidly sinking condition, he was capable of feeling, that Seekleham

observed his visitor's respectful treatment of the favourites of his earliest infancy. Two poets who, he well remembered, had welcomed his birth with enthusiasm, were carefully bestowed by Time in the Hall of Eternity in company with the illustrious singer of his later days. In the profound cynicism that had grown upon him in the closing years of his life he had fancied himself indifferent to their fate ; but even at that moment he felt a stir in his failing heart at the recollection of the glory and the freshness of their cradle song ; and he hailed their escape from the wallet of Oblivion with a sigh of genuine relief.

But, on the other hand, if it was without serious concern, it was with unfeigned amazement that he watched the havoc which Time was making elsewhere. Figures which from his earliest days he had seen his children regard with awe and admiration were chucked, with scarcely so much as a glance at them, in the gaping mouth of the sack. Some of them Seekleham himself, in his representative capacity, had not rated very highly, and had indeed looked upon as mere idols of a passing fashion among his sons. But for others he had personally entertained, at one or another period of his life, a respect which, though no longer perhaps so high as it once had been, he had not altogether outgrown ; and it was with a feeling of almost bewilderment that he saw them thus unceremoniously treated.

It was one thing to doubt their claim to the niche and pedestal, and another to see them summarily banished to the dust heap.

But the Grand Old Dustman went steadily, and methodically, and mercilessly through them all—statesmen, lawyers, *savants*, poets, philosophers, critics, historians, novelists,

playwrights, painters, sculptors, architects, inventors, actors, singers, preachers, pill-makers : he spared none. His biggest hauls were made from the ranks of the politicians, the preachers, and the pill-makers ; then came the men of letters, then the painters and actors, in the order named. It was among the singers, practitioners of the art in which imposture is the most difficult, that he obtained the fewest recruits for his wallet. But on the whole it was a monstrous "catch," and Seekleham's wonder grew as he watched its progress.

Nor was he much less astonished at the promotions than at the degradations of which he was a witness. Many a small and humble effigy, lurking unnoticed in some obscure corner, was taken up by Time, and after a careful and respectful dusting established on a shelf in the place vacated by some one or other of the condemned busts—often, too, in a higher position than some of those which had been allowed to remain. But Seekleham's amazement did not reach its highest pitch till he saw Time produce some half-dozen or so of entirely new effigies from under his single scanty garment, and place them on the shelves beside the others. It was not the feat itself which surprised the Moribund, for he had seen conjurers produce fish-bowls from beneath a silk handkerchief ; and as he had often heard of the "magic of Time," there seemed nothing very wonderful in his being able to perform a similar trick. But what did astonish him was the effigies themselves, which were absolutely unknown to him. Even in the last few minutes of his existence the flame of curiosity flickered up for a moment, and this, together with his inveterate habit of politeness, compelled an effort to speak.

Pointing with a trembling finger at the strange effigies : “ Introduce me ! ” he muttered to his companion.

With a glibness born of manifest familiarity, Time ran through their names.

“ Never—heard of—the—gentlemen,” murmured Seekleham feebly, sinking back again on his pillow.

“ No, I am quite aware of that,” said the other coolly. “ Your successor, however, and your successor’s successor will hear a good deal of them. But you have only another few minutes left now, and you must prepare to bid your final adieu to those who have the best right to be present at your departure.”

Seekleham was past speaking. His lips could only frame the noiseless interrogatory—“ Who ? ”

“ Who ! ” said Time. “ Why, the Decadents, of course.”

There was no speculation in Seekleham’s eyes. It did not seem quite certain whether or not he knew who the Decadents were. But when the door of the Vestibule was flung open, and they stalked slowly in, a melancholy train, a faint glance of recognition, though not of welcome, stole over his features.

They sat down at his bedside, and one after another they began to sing. Their songs were in praise of exhaustion, and disillusion, and failure, and emptiness, and weariness, and the vain regrets of yesterday, and the lying promises of to-morrow, and the unspeakable monotony of to-day.

One of them took up the subject of exhaustion, and recited a sombre poem in which a Mongolian necromancer, by name Ah Sin, predicts the decay of Caucasian civilisation. A second sang of disillusion, of things which are not as they seem, and of the visions which were about him,

A third had chosen the snows of the previous winter for his theme, and pointed out how gratifying it was to reflect that when once melted they were irrecoverably lost. A fourth had composed a hymn of thanksgiving for the inestimable blessing of the sensation that to-day is exactly like yesterday, and for the exquisitely restful thought that to-morrow will be indistinguishable from to-day. This hymn he called a *Tedium Vitæ*, and he recited it with considerable unction, and with as much feeling as he was capable of showing.

After this they all joined in the strophic and antistrophic recitation of an Ode to the Spirit of Decadence, which meant, as was explained in the Ode, the Spirit begotten of the fact of living in an age of exhaustion and disillusion, and failure, and emptiness, and weariness, and *getting rather to like it*. And they wound up with a chorus of congratulation to Seekleham on the strength of his rapidly approaching departure, since, although Decadence was nice, Death was still better, and they sped him with envy on his journey.

Old Seekleham, however, had not waited for their permission to depart. Indeed, at the very first notes of the first Decadent's song his face assumed a look not merely of resignation to, but of impatience for, his end ; and some two or three "numbers" before the valedictory Ode it would have been plain to any one but a poet or singer, actively engaged in the practice of his egotistic profession, that Old Seekleham was *in articulo mortis*.

As a matter of fact, the World Clock struck twelve while the third Decadent was poetically explaining his discovery of the deliquescence of snow.

By the time the chorus was concluded, Old Seekleham had, in a sense more than usually emphatic, passed away. He had disappeared, couch and all, and on the spot which the couch had occupied there now stood a cradle containing a baby with a singularly aged face.

I.

THE FIRST AGE.

“At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms.”

YES, there was no denying it. Little Vicesimus Æon was almost as old-looking as the departed Seekleham. His wide-open eyes had as meditative and as wearied a look as though they were gazing out of the head of a septuagenarian. The upward curl of his button nose seemed an indication rather of cynicism than immaturity ; the expression of his shapeless mouth was one of profound melancholy.

Time eyed the elderly infant with a grim smile, and rocked its cradle gently with the handle of his scythe.

“Are you conscious of yourself yet, Vicesimus ?” he asked.

“But imperfectly,” answered the child, with a slight sigh. “But what age has ever fully realised its own *ethos* until it was drawing to a close ? I suppose I shall require a poet to interpret me to myself.”

“H’m !” said Time, dryly, “that is rather a pity. I am afraid you will have to wait some time. Old Seekleham got himself explained that way, but not till his life was more than half over. And after that, so many people went into the interpreting business that he got tired of them. At any rate, he paid very little attention to a good many of them in his later years.

"Oh, very well!" said Vicesimus, carelessly, "I can wait. And, indeed, I am not sure that I care about a poetic interpretation of myself. I should be satisfied with the scientific exegesis."

"You portentous little prig," muttered Time to his snowy beard, "you are realising yourself at this moment, in that hideous jargon of yours, if you only knew it. Look here, Vicesimus," he continued, aloud, "you can get the interpretation you want, and easily enough, by watching the ways of your own children."

"Of my own children?" said the babe, passing his hand musingly over his tired young eyes, "I am not sure that I understand you."

"I am quite sure you don't," said his aged companion. "Indeed it is impossible that you should. Nevertheless, it is really very simple. Babe as you are, you are the spiritual father of—"

"Stop! I only admit the word spiritual provisionally, understand. I am not certain that it has any meaning. But continue."

"You are the spiritual father of every babe that has been born into the world since you appeared. You inspire them, all unconsciously to yourself. They are now what you have made them: what they will become will be what you shall make them hereafter. You can realise yourself in your babyhood of to-day by simply selecting a typical baby and watching its ways. In boyhood, in youth, in manhood, in old age, you will always be able to find your own interpretation by seeking out the typical boy, youth, man, or what not."

"That," said Vicesimus, reflectively, "will be extremely interesting. Produce a typical baby."

"I will do so presently," said Time. "Or, rather, I will take you to see one. But you are in a little too much of a hurry. Allow me, at the risk of boring you, to explain the situation to you with a little more precision. You are aware, I suppose, that you are my child?"

Vicesimus looked up at the greybeard with a pitying smile.

"How true it is," he murmured half to himself, "that man never knows how anthropomorphic he is. You mean," he continued, aloud, "that I am probably being spoken of as the latest birth of Time. It is, of course, one of those mere figures of speech with which men delude themselves, but it ought not to have taken *you* in. However, continue; let us assume for the purposes of your argument that I am, as you say, your child."

"The spirit," proceeded the other, in a more solemn tone, "the spirit which you yourself are breathing into your children is itself an emanation from me. It is the *Zeitgeist* in *you* which—— But you smile! What at?"

"Nothing, nothing. Only that word of yours, the *Zeitgeist*. A little old-fashioned, you know. But go on."

"It is the *Zeitgeist* animating *you*," continued Time in a sterner voice, "which is the moulding and shaping, the quickening and impelling, principle in your children. But do not on that account suppose yourself to have absolute control over them, or even over yourself. If it is your spirit—*my* spirit—which moves them to action, it is no less true that that action in its turn reacts upon the motive power—to restrain it, to modify it, to deflect it, nay, sometimes even to reverse it. Your children, the children of the Twentieth Century, will have many thoughts, many feelings

which they will owe to you, their spiritual father; but the Time Spirit in you will itself be conscious of some new impulses, some fresh stirrings, which will have been communicated to it by them. Sometimes the interaction will be so subtle that many will find it hard to say whether it be the Time Spirit which is moulding the thoughts and wills of men, or whether it be men themselves, who by dint of speech and action are generating around them a new atmosphere, and within them a new inspiration of Thought and Will. But one thing I can tell you, that you and they together, Man and the Time Spirit, will undergo many metamorphic changes, and that the series of these transmutations will soon commence. Or, in other words," he added, *sotto voce*, "that you will soon become something better than the odious little pedant-in-swaddling-clothes that you are now."

"Amid much," said Vicesimus, "that I know to be misleading metaphor, and more that I suspect to be unsound psychology, I am still able to say that I fairly comprehend your meaning. Lead on to the typical baby."

"I will take you to see one," said Time, lifting Vicesimus out of his cradle and limping off with him. "It is the simpler plan of the two."

"I have no doubt I could walk if I tried," said Vicesimus, somewhat hurt at the indignity.

"The typical baby cannot," replied Time; "at least, not at present. When it is a few days old it may be able to do so, but thus far it more or less resembles babies of an earlier period, so far as its physical powers are concerned. It is the maturity of its intellectual faculties which is the most striking of its characteristics. It is that, I think, which will be most gratifying to you as a father."

"I shall study it with much interest," replied Vicesimus ; "but I can promise you no more."

They had now arrived at the nursery to which Time had been conveying his latest born. It was a large and somewhat bare room, neatly decorated with geometrical figures and anatomical and other diagrams. In a cradle in its midst reposed a baby of a few hours old, with a look of intense philosophical curiosity on its expressive countenance, and an air of half melancholy, half cynical Pyrrhonism in its speaking eye. A young woman who, from the extravagance of her costume and the levity of her demeanour, appeared to date from about the beginning of the last quarter of the previous century, was officially disturbing the meditations of her infant charge by rocking the cradle with her foot. After a few minutes spent in this occupation, the nurse began to croon, half to herself, half to the baby, the words of an early Victorian lyric :—

" Tom, Tom, the piper's son,
Stole a pig, and away he run."

Several times over she repeated this weird distich, and on each occasion the rhyme seemed to send a shudder through the baby's frame. At the fifth repetition of it he held up a slightly creased forefinger, as though to enjoin silence, and then, turning half round in his cradle, he delivered himself, after a moment's reflection, of the following impromptu criticism :—

" Come ! come ! 'away he *run*'—
Such grammar, girl, is worse than none.
Should we not read, 'the piper's *man*,
Stole a pig, and away he ran' ? '

"*Meo periculo*, of course," he added with a slight smile, as he resumed his former position in the cradle.

The girl, somewhat abashed, accepted the emendation, and continued her recital in the new form suggested by it. But it was evidently an effort to her, and after a few minutes she relapsed into silence.

"Is that a son to be proud of, or not?" said Time, who it is unnecessary to say was as invisible to the nurse as was his companion, and whom the baby no doubt would not have believed in if it could have seen him.

"Yes," said Vicesimus, "he is not what you would call a backward child. The principles of grammar have evidently got themselves thoroughly organised among the hereditary faculties of the race. They now come by nature, as writing and reading have done for many centuries. Still, I should like to see some evidences of scientific information and reasoning power. I hate precocious children, but there are some things which even children ought to know, and——"

"Hush!" interrupted Time. "Unless I am mistaken, the nurse is repeating to herself some lines of an early biological poem which ought to provide exactly the sort of test you require."

And, sure enough, the girl at that moment began to repeat in a louder voice :—

" How doth the little busy bee
 Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
 From every opening flower."

She was not allowed to get any further, for at this point the baby struck in with the sarcastic interpellation :—

“ *How* doth the little bee do this ?
 Why, by an impulse blind.
 Cease then to praise good works of such
 An automatic kind.”

“ What do you think of that ? ” asked Time.

“ Satisfactory enough,” answered the infant Age. “ It shows dialectical alertness, and an early grasp of biological truth. But listen ! ”

Again the nurse resumed her recital, in these words :—

“ Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
 For God hath made them so ;
 Let bears and lions growl and fight,
 For ‘tis their nature to.”

“ Indeed ! ” interrupted the baby, with an indescribable bitterness of contempt—

“ Indeed ! A brutal nature then
 Excuses brutal ways.
 Unthinking wench ! you little know
 The problems that you raise.”

The girl, however, apparently without heeding the interruption, continued :—

“ But, children, you should never let
 Your angry passions rise ;
 Your little hands were never made
 To tear each other’s eyes.”

But again from the cradle arose that voice of relentless criticism :—

“ Not *made* to tear ! well, what of that ?
 No more, at first, were claws.
 All comes of Adaptation, fool,
 No need of Final Cause.”

And if we use the hands to tear
Just as the nose to smell,
Ere many ages have gone by
They'll do it very well."

"Knows his Darwin—eh?" said Time, with a wink at his young companion.

"Yes. I am not sure that his applications of his knowledge are always quite sound," said Vicesimus, "but that is a matter of opinion. And now what are his moral sentiments like? Is he abreast of the New Humanity? That is the question."

"And a question which ought to be settled," said Time, "by the barbarous old nursery ditty that I hear that girl repeating to herself."

And, as he spoke, the nurse broke out into that ancient cradle song of our Aryan forefathers:—

"By, baby bunting,
Father's gone a-hunting,
All to get a rabbit's skin
To wrap the baby bunting in."

Slowly, and in a tone of profound seriousness, like Arthur answering Sir Bedivere from the barge, the baby delivered itself of the following protest:—

"The cruel sport of hunting
To moral sense is stunting,
And, since papa's objection
To useful vivisection
Convicts him, as it seems to me,
Of signal inconsistency,
I must, with thanks, decline the skin
For wrapping baby bunting in."

"Will that do?" asked Time, in a tone of exultation which might or might not be feigned.

"Quite, thank you!" said Vicesimus. "My inspection of the typical baby has been exceedingly interesting, and has been attended with thoroughly satisfactory results. Nothing could be more gratifying to a parent than the sight of so thoughtful and up-to-date an infant. And to think that a few short centuries ago a child of that age would have been simply 'mewling and puking in his nurse's arms'!"

"Yes," said Time; "he doesn't mewl much, does he?"

"He doesn't mewl at all," replied Vicesimus; "at least, if I rightly understand what mewling is. And he only pukes after a spiritual and allegorical fashion. His puking is, in fact, the mere rejection of the crude and undigested beliefs of the past."

"You ought to be very proud of him," said his aged companion, grinning.

"No doubt I ought," said the other. "I ought, I suppose," he continued, as he re-composed himself into a comfortable attitude in the arms of Time, "to feel like the man celebrated in those lines of the old Roman poet:—

‘ Omnes omnia
Bona dicere et laudare fortunas meas
Qui gnatum haberem tali ingenio præditum.’

You may take me away again. The only thing we have to do now is to let Nature have its way with that child, and to beware of forcing the tender plant."

II. THE SECOND AGE.

“ Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel,
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.”

VICESIMUS watched his babies with interest, and, for the whole time of his own babyhood, with sympathy. He was much struck by their High Seriousness, as they called it, in conversation with each other ; and he admired it all the more because he felt that they derived it from him. It was the same habit of mind by which he had himself been led to rebuke what he regarded as the frivolities of Time. For Time, indeed, he had no respect whatever, or scarcely any. Even from his earliest moments he had felt no disposition to recognise either relationship or debt to him. As a matter of dry scientific fact, Vicesimus was, of course, aware of his descent from him ; and, equally of course, he could not deny that his own mental possessions and characteristics—his thoughts and impulses, his emotions and beliefs—were in some sort a derivation and inheritance from this despised old Abstraction. But he heartily disliked the thought, and put it away from him at every recurrence of it with an increasing impatience.

The truth was that Vicesimus resented the notion of being the offspring of anybody. He liked to think of himself as self-caused, as a being who had sprung into existence

out of an eternal primordial germ, which had itself always existed, and had always contained the potentiality of Vicesimus—nay, which *was* Vicesimus from all eternity. He objected strongly to Time's describing him as being, or as possessing, or as being animated by, a spirit; and though the poverty of language compelled him sometimes to use that word in describing his own nature and energy, he always used it under protest: for spirit had a derivative sound about it, and Vicesimus not only resented the thought of his having been made, created, or begotten, but did not like even to think of himself as “proceeding.”

Nevertheless, he took considerable pride in the infant generation of his own heirs, and would not for a moment have admitted that their High Seriousness was self-originated, or come by in any way save through inheritance from him.

But whatever the origin of the quality, Vicesimus declared to himself, again and again, as he looked round the world from his cradle, that it was never more urgently needed by civilised mankind. For the sight of those civilised members of the human race who had survived from the days of the departed Seekleham filled him with dismay. Indeed he often asked himself, in the words of the Mongolian necromancer, whom he had occasionally heard quoted by Time, whether civilisation was not a failure, and “the Caucasian played out.” All mankind, or all adult mankind, were relapsing, he declared with bitterness, so far as their intellectual tastes were concerned, into primitive savagery.

They were absolutely given over to Romances of Adventure!

Men and women, rich and poor, busy, or so-called busy, and idle, alike, they were all in the same case. Every

moment which they could steal from eating, drinking, sleeping, and money-getting was devoted to the Romance of Adventure.

The Red Indian sitting by his camp-fire was not more eager to hear or to tell some story of the hunt or the battle. The ancient Scandinavian or the modern Maori was not fonder of fairy tales and folk lore. The generation bred up on the Mysteries of Udolpho, and the Castle Spectre, and Melmoth the Wanderer could not have been more devoted to the supernatural. No man or woman over forty would look at anything else. As soon as the housewife could scramble carelessly through her domestic duties, as soon as the father of the family could hurry away from his scamped or neglected business, the whole household settled down to the only kind of "evening at home" for which they cared. Statesmen, ecclesiastics, barristers, solicitors, stockbrokers, artists, architects, civil engineers, soldiers on leave, sailors on shore, physicians, surgeons, and even general practitioners deaf to the calls of the night bell, gathered, so to speak, round their respective camp-fires, and read Romances of Adventure to each other aloud.

The cheeks of middle-aged men flushed hot with generous excitement, as in imagination they watched some act of heroism by flood or field; and elderly hearts beat faster at the tale of some hairbreadth escape. Every night, in hundreds of thousands of households all over the civilised world, adult audiences sat breathless while treasures were discovered in mysterious islands; while unexplored continents were forced to unveil their long-hidden secrets of blood, and terror, and superstition; while daring hunters skilfully "potted" elephants, and still more adroitly preserved themselves; and

while ghosts and ghost-seers “taught the laws of death’s untrodden realm” to the mortal upon earth, with almost enough confidence and precision to enable him to offer himself for examination on the subject and qualify for a degree.

And all this time studious infants, withdrawn in disgust from the society of their frivolous elders, lay musing in their cradles on “Robert Elsmere,” or studying with pleasure the exquisite literary vignettes of Dean Howells, the last of the great American divines.

“The infants of this generation,” exclaimed Vicesimus, with enthusiasm, “will save themselves by their gravity, and the adult world by their example.”

Thus passed away the period of his childhood: thus, and with this singular contrast between childhood and old age ever before his eyes—the one full of High Seriousness, the other consumed by an unquenchable thirst for the Romance of Adventure. Needless to say, the victory was to the young. One by one the old and middle-aged schoolboys went off upon an unknown adventure of their own, while grave infants stepped out of their cradles, advanced, or rather receded, from long clothes to “short coats,” contracted still further to knickerbockers, expanded again to trousers, and finally went to school.

But then, to use a phrase struck out in a flash of inspiration by the author of a Romance of Adventure, a “strange thing happened.”

The High Seriousness of the infant population had gone on getting higher and more serious every year. From long clothes to short coats, from short coats to knickerbockers,

from knickerbockers to trousers their gravity had continued to increase ; but when they reached an age to be sent to school they showed, to the surprise of their elders, no particular eagerness to avail themselves of that privilege of their years. Whether it was that the energetic process of self-instruction to which they had one and all subjected themselves, from the very first hour of their existence, had taught them everything, or had merely given them a distaste for all teaching but their own, it were hard to say ; but certain it is that they showed no desire to go to school, and that they had not been long there before they began to manifest the profoundest disgust for it. Crowds of them might be seen daily, their morning faces shining with the inspiration of independent thought, and transfigured by a noble yearning for intellectual freedom, creeping like snails unwillingly to school. Many of them had their satchels full of thoughtful essays on the futility of education.

And Vicesimus, though at first he was shocked and scandalised at their unwillingness to go to school, was, to his own surprise, not long in sympathising with it.

This change in his feelings dated from the day when Time at his request accompanied him on a visit of inspection to one of the schools. It was a large, bare room, containing however no more than about fifty boys, each seated at a small table with an adult by his side.

“ Who are the ‘grown-ups’ ? ” inquired Vicesimus, somewhat puzzled.

“ Masters,” replied Time. “ Who should they be ? ”

“ But there are fifty of them ! ”

“ Well, why not ? ”

“ But there are only fifty boys ! ”

"*Only* fifty ! Would you have more boys than masters ? "

"I don't understand you."

"Don't you. It's perfectly plain. It is just because there are only fifty boys that there are no more than fifty masters."

"Yes, yes !" said Vicesimus, impatiently, "but why so many ?"

"So many boys ?"

"No, no ! so many masters. So many for that number of boys."

"I don't know," said Time, carelessly, "unless it is because that is the custom of the age."

"The custom of the age ?" said Vicesimus, indignantly. "But *I* am the age, and I think that the proportion of one master per head of the attendance is excessive. How comes it that the schools are so preposterously over-staffed ? It is not *my* animating spirit that has suggested such an absurdity. That, at least, I can answer for."

"No," replied Time, "it is the development of a tendency encouraged during his closing years by the late lamented Seekleham. But you had better inquire a little into the educational system. You will find that the large number of masters is an inevitable incident of it."

"What is the curriculum ?" asked Vicesimus.

"There is no curriculum," was the reply.

Vicesimus stared at the aged Figure for a moment, and then smiled slightly.

"Perhaps you don't understand me," he said : "I will ask one of the masters."

"He will be certain not to understand you," said Time, dryly. "All he knows—and perhaps he has forgotten

that, unless the word occurs in a chronicler of his period—is that ‘curriculum’ is the Latin for a racecourse.”

“Yes ; but it also means a course of studies.”

“Exactly, and that is why he won’t understand it. There is no course of studies—not in any one school. If you want to see a course of studies you will have to make a round of schools. And you will find it a good day’s work, I can tell you. There are as many as ten schools, each exclusively devoted to the teaching of a different section of the same period. And it is not a long period, either. I remember it as well as if it was yesterday ; indeed, as far as I am concerned it *was* yesterday. From the accession of Henry II. to the Council of Clarendon.”

“Do you mean to say that this school is solely engaged in teaching the history of——”

“I mean to say,” said Time, a little impatiently, “that the parents of a boy who comes into this school at ten years old, and leaves it at eighteen, may count upon his knowing his English history from 1154 to 1164 as well as any parents could desire.”

“But nothing else ?” asked Vicesimus, wonderingly.

“No, nothing else. But then, you see, what he does know he knows thoroughly and at first hand—mark that, at first hand. You see that pupil leaving the schoolroom with his master ; where do you suppose they are bound for ?”

“I have no idea.”

“The Record Office, my boy !” exclaimed Time, in a tone of triumph, real or assumed. “The Record Office, to consult an ‘original authority.’ Now, perhaps, you understand the reason why there is one master to each boy.

Oh, there is no smattering here, I can tell you. Every boy is thoroughly well grounded by the time he leaves school."

"Yes," said Vicesimus, "in English history from 1154 to 1164. But would he be so thoroughly well grounded in anything else? Or only," he added, with a touch of bitterness, "thoroughly well gravelled? What does he do when he leaves school? Goes to a university, I suppose?"

The irony with which Vicesimus put this last question was apparent enough in his tone. But Time, without seeming to notice it, quietly answered, "Yes."

"What?" exclaimed his young descendant. "A university! A society for the study and teaching of the *Universitas Scientiarum*? Or a body empowered to confer degrees upon whosoever prove themselves adequately instructed in the history of England from 1154 to 1164?"

"No," said Time, "it's longer than that. There is a university for every 'period,' though there are schools and degrees in every section of each period."

"But it is all history? No other faculties?"

"My dear boy," said Time, smiling, "the students themselves have no other faculties when they come here, and they wouldn't appreciate any variety of that kind in their university. To provide it would be useless, and perhaps worse. It would mean either superfluity or confusion, or possibly both."

"Is nothing but history taught anywhere; in any school or university?"

"Oh, yes!" was the reply, "science is also taught."

"On the same admirable principle of the division of labour?"

"Just the same, only it is perhaps carried a little further. Take, for instance, the case of Anatomy. That subject supports ten universities, each devoted to the study of a different tissue for the 'soft parts' alone ; and there is an eleventh, the University of Osteology, which has just founded a Professorship of the Spinal Column, and has a school, and grants degrees for each separate bone in the body."

"The whole system," said Vicesimus, a little discontentedly for such a child of science, "seems to be purely scientific."

"Not entirely," was the reply ; "there is a considerable portion of the public who are passionately devoted to the study of the supernatural, and the various scientific bodies, to save themselves from becoming too unpopular, have humoured it. There has for some time past been a Chair of Demonology ; there are several Professors of Spookical Research, and they have quite recently founded a Readership in Palmistry."

"Is—is there," said Vicesimus after some hesitation, "any teaching of English literature either in school or university?"

"Literature? I suppose you mean philology."

"I suppose I do," said Vicesimus, meekly ; for he felt more and more out of harmony with his environment.

"They are the same thing, you know. Yes, there are several Philological Universities."

"Real literature," said the other after a pause, during which he seemed to be reflecting deeply, "is of course the same thing as philology ; but there is—or was, I believe—a form of so-called literature which does not *exactly* square with it. I mean Poetry. Do they teach poetry now?"

"Teach it?" echoed Time with a chuckle. "No, they don't exactly teach it. They try and cure it."

"Eh?" said the other, puzzled. "Cure it?"

"Yes, cure it! Don't you understand?"

"Oh, to be sure—of course!" replied Vicesimus, ashamed of not being up-to-date. "How stupid of me. You mean that their Schools of Poetry——"

"There are no Schools of Poetry—only hospitals."

"Well, then, their Universities of Poetry——"

"There are no Universities of Poetry—only asylums."

"What? Well, now, I confess I don't understand."

"Yet it is very simple. The sufferers whose cases are not considered hopeless are sent to the hospitals. The incurables are drafted off to the asylums. As a rule, if a patient is not restored to prose in the course of a couple of years, he is regarded as an incurable, and a place is found for him in an asylum as soon as possible."

"I see," said Vicesimus: "they treat poetry as a disease!"

"Is it anything else?" said Time, with a quiet smile.

"Well, no; perhaps not. Only it isn't catching."

"I am not so sure of that," was the reply, "nor is the scientific world. Indeed, I may say that the preponderance of scientific opinion is the other way. The prevalent treatment, in fact, presupposes it; for, otherwise, I doubt whether society would consider itself justified in putting poets under restraint. In themselves, they are usually harmless enough; but it is felt that nothing short of a system of rigid isolation will stamp out the disease."

Vicesimus remained silent for a few moments. In spite of his air of indifference he did not feel quite comfortable.

Saturated as he was by inheritance with the scientific spirit, he had to confess to himself that he was not altogether reconciled to the theory that poetry was a mere form of mental aberration. Whether it was that the discontent of his school-boy children was reacting upon him, or whether the feeling was self-originated, he could not bring himself to regard an exclusively scientific system of education as absolutely satisfying to his whole nature.

"Was poetry," he murmured, almost timidly, "considered a disease in Old Seekleham's time?"

"A good many things were not considered diseases in Old Seekleham's time which people are wise enough nowadays to recognise as such," replied the other, in that provokingly ambiguous tone which might conceal either earnestness or irony. "The truth is that it was mainly owing to Old Seekleham himself that it ever became as serious a matter as it is. The disease was rapidly becoming endemic in the closing years of his life; but he was one of those who believe in leaving maladies of that kind to themselves. A fatal mistake. Nobody could have given the system of neglect a fairer trial than he did with most of his afflicted poets for at least twenty years before his end."

"Yet the disease continued to spread?"

"It continued to spread, and it showed signs of becoming congenital in the race. You have heard of children 'lisping in numbers'—pooh, no! what am I saying? Of course you can't have,—well, there always have been such children, and they got at last to multiply at an appalling rate. Every child began to 'lisp in numbers,' and in the last year of his existence—I didn't tell him about it; the poor old fellow

was becoming imbecile, and I thought I would let him end in peace—society found that it would have to put its foot down in earnest. Some well-known philanthropists took the lead, and the scourge was resolutely tackled. Hence the hospitals and asylums. They board out the children who show inherited symptoms of the complaint, and endeavour by regular exercise, simple, healthful diet, and all the rest of it, to eradicate the taint in childhood. Sometimes they are successful; and a baby who began by ‘lisping in numbers’ may be all right and quite competently pedestrian by the time he is two or three years old. Another will remain uncertain on his feet much longer, and, of course, if when he reaches the period of youth he shows any well-marked indications of the malady—‘rolling eye,’ for instance—they pack him off to the hospital without a moment’s delay. Nothing like taking the thing in time.”

“What is the treatment?” asked Vicesimus.

“Oh, it varies with the severity of the attack. For a mild form of it, such as the blank-verse variety, a purely herbal treatment is sometimes sufficient. Chopped leaves of grass have been tried with good results. The ‘lengths’ become gradually more and more irregular, and the patient after a while is discharged cured. But, as a matter of fact, if any patient remains in, or can be reduced to, the blank-verse stage, they generally discharge him.”

“Indeed!” said Vicesimus.

“Yes, he is considered convalescent; as, indeed, he usually is. He requires a keeper for a time, of course, but, as a rule, he is soon able to dispense with his services. In nine cases out of ten a so-called ‘blank-verse patient’ is in reality a cured man, and talks as rationally as the rest of us,

only a little more monotonously. It takes a quick ear to distinguish it from prose."

"But the more acute cases?"

"Well, they do the best they can with them : that is about all you can say. That—and that it's a thoroughly humane system. No whips, or chains, or strait waistcoats. Just a simple padded room for the lyrical cases, and that is all. But really I don't know why we should go on discussing this painful subject. I thought we had come here to study the schools."

"I don't want to study the schools," said Vicesimus, shortly. And he added, after another glance around him at the fifty pupils each deep in his "ten years' section," with his master at his side, "They are as painful to me as hospitals."

He was surprised at himself when he had said it ; and not less so at the strength of those vague inward stirrings of unrest which had forced the exclamation from him.

Time surveyed him for a moment with a curious sort of smile, and then went his way.

But Vicesimus could not go that way. To his extreme astonishment he found himself—latest birth of Time as he was—in constantly strengthening opposition to what he had supposed to be his own spirit, the Spirit of the Age. As year succeeded year, and he watched the growing restlessness and discontent of the rising generation with the established educational system and methods, he felt himself drawn into ever-closer sympathy with their mood. It was far from a willing sympathy ; indeed, he tried with all his might to resist it. His pride revolted at the notion of taking his cue from his own children.

"Can this," he often asked himself uneasily, "can this be the experience for which Time prepared me? Are these young rascals really reacting upon their Era?" And he struggled harder than ever to show them that he had no notion of being influenced by them.

But it was in vain. They were influencing him more and more powerfully every year. He rebelled as they did against a culture which nourished nothing in human nature but its critical, analytic, and deductive faculties, and left its imaginative and emotional parts to starve. And he heartily sympathised with their eagerness for the hour which should bring their period of tutelage to an end, and set them free to satisfy those instincts of their being to which science had wholly failed to respond.

But before that hour came, another, big with momentous consequences, had struck for Vicesimus himself.

How it all happened he never precisely knew. All he could remember was that one day, as he lay asleep, he felt a hand pressed lightly upon his closed eyelids, and that he opened them and looked up.

Beside him stood a woman, fair as Aphrodite, grave as Pallas, royal as Hera, with form and features of a divine majesty and beauty, and with all the glory of the sunset, all the mystery of the starlight, in her unfathomable eyes.

It was a radiant but a momentary vision. She smiled upon him, beckoned to him, and—was gone.

He sprang to his feet, and stared around him in amazement. Time was sitting near him, toying with his hour-glass; but Vicesimus took no note of the figure at his side, for he was gazing upon a transfigured world!

Cloud and sunshine, sea and mountain, brook and meadow, leaf and flower, the browsing kine, the soaring lark, the skimming swallow, all were changed, all glorified ; beautiful beyond words, strange past all imagining. An unspeakable peace contended with an intolerable yearning for the mastery of his soul.

"Who—who was that ?" he stammered at last.

"Who was what ?" asked Time carelessly.

"That—that—" and Vicesimus stopped, speechless, as "woman," "angel," "goddess," rose together to his lips. "She—she who touched my eyes and woke me ; she whom I saw for a moment, and who is gone."

"Touched your eyes, did she ?" said Time. "Then that's not all she has done to you, my young friend. You have been touched somewhere else, you will find."

"In my heart ?" cried Vicesimus, eagerly.

"Perhaps !" replied his companion drily, "but in your head certainly. That attractive but half-witted female is the mother, or the mistress, or the goddess, or the saint-patroness—they don't seem to know exactly what the relation is, and they all disagree with each other about it, and for that matter with themselves in different moods—of those unfortunate lunatics we have been talking of. That is Poesy !"

"Well, she is simply the most beautiful young creature I ever saw," said Vicesimus with conviction.

"Young !" echoed the other. "Pooh ! she is almost as old as I am."

For the first time since his awakening Vicesimus turned and looked at the speaker ; and a fresh flood of amazement poured over him.

"But you!" he exclaimed, "you are not old! You are young!"

"You flatter me," said Time, grimly.

"Flatter you! You don't suspect me of irony?"

"No! only of idiocy. I know the symptoms too well."

"Yes!" repeated Vicesimus, growing more and more excited, "you are young—young, and fresh, and straight, and smiling, and light of footstep! And I who thought you so old, and grey, and dull, so lame and bowed! Why, where is your goat-beard, man? And your stoop? And your forelock? And your leaden foot? And what's gone of your scythe? And what's come to your hour-glass?"

For, though the contents of the upper globe mysteriously kept their level, its sands were sliding downward through the neck with tenfold rapidity, in a thread of flying gold.

Vicesimus struck his rejuvenated companion on the shoulder, and broke into a merry peal of laughter.

"Ay," grumbled Time, "laugh on, featherhead! It is easy to see what is the matter with you."

And, in fact, it was easy. Nothing in the world could have been easier.

Vicesimus was in love!

III.

THE THIRD AGE.

“ And then the lover
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress’ eyebrow.”

THE two stood looking at each other for a few moments in a silence which Time was the first to break.

“ Good-bye,” he said. “ I am going.”

“ Going ! ” exclaimed Vicesimus, in sudden alarm. “ Oh, no ! stay ! stay, I entreat of you—stay for ever ! I wish—oh, how I wish that you might never move again ! ”

“ Thank you ! ” replied the other ; “ but I have never led a sedentary life, and, in spite of your kind compliments, I am too old to form new habits. My rate of movement varies, no doubt, but I never stop.”

“ Never stop ! ” cried Vicesimus. “ Well, no, not for other people, perhaps. I could understand that. But not for *me*? ”

“ No,” said Time sturdily, “ not for you ! ”

The other gazed at him with a countenance in which astonishment, disgust, and grief were gradually merged in an expression of scandalised indignation. That at this particular moment—the moment when the world had, for the first time, become enchanted to him, and nothing was wanting for its enjoyment but that Time should just oblige by staying where he was—he should refuse to do so !

The thing was simply monstrous. Vicesimus was too much hurt and wounded to utter another word.

After a minute or two, Time spoke again.

"Besides," he said, with a touch of the old familiar irony in his voice, "you must remember that in your present mood you are not particularly good company for me. You can hardly expect me to care about remaining with one who for hours, days, weeks, months, perhaps years to come, will be perfectly unconscious of my existence. No, Vicesimus, I will say good-bye to you. You think you want me to stay, but you don't. If I were to take you at your word, you would soon be in a fever of impatience with me for not moving. Later on, it will be different. I will pay you another visit when you are some years older, and *then* perhaps I shall believe in the sincerity of your invitation. *Then*, when you ask me to stay, I shall know that you mean it—and you," he added to himself, "will wish you may get it!"

He was gone in a moment, justifying one of his last remarks in the very act of departing, for Vicesimus was quite unconscious of his flight.

What is more, he remained so for several years to come; and so did a very large majority of his children. Even while Time was uttering those farewell words of his, they came pouring in a tumultuous, nay a rebellious, concourse out of the schools. Their masters, one to every boy, rushed after them, expostulating, exhorting, beseeching, denouncing, but in vain. A madness against which they were powerless to contend had seized their pupils. The historical student no longer cared a fig about dates; the

student of anatomy snapped his fingers at the lecturer on the sesamoid bones ; the youthful biologist ridiculed the pretensions of his tutor to give him any real insight into life. The revolt was general ; but the insurgents, having flung off their chains, were, as in many other cases, at a loss to know what to do with their liberty. They hurried aimlessly hither and thither, or gathered together in a confused and swaying crowd.

It was the moment of Vicesimus, and he felt it. "They have been influencing me long enough," he said to himself ; "it is time for me to breathe some of my new spirit into them." And, stepping forward a pace or two, he shouted in a loud voice : " Is it possible, my boys, that you don't know the first thing to be done ? The poets ! The poets ! Release the persecuted poets ! "

The effect was instantaneous. The words of Vicesimus fell like a blow of the flint upon the steel, striking out the fiery thought that had lain hidden in the mind of all. A wild cry broke from the lips of the crowd, and hastily snatching up such weapons as they could find, they hurried pell mell to the nearest hospital.

Vicesimus followed them at a distance, curious to see what would happen, and not without a feeling of pride that he was regaining his ascendancy over his children.

The hospital was reached, "rushed," and carried promptly by assault. The medical staff were overpowered without much difficulty. The doors were thrown open, and with piercing but melodious cries of joy and gratitude the poets streamed out. At the sight of the sun, no longer seen through the windows of a ward, at the kiss of the breeze of freedom on their brows and cheeks, at the voices of their

young deliverers, some of them burst into song that broke down in tears ; others (and these the stronger) into tears that were staunched in song. And at the sight and sound of them Vicesimus, fresh himself from the touch of Poesy, was deeply moved.

Nevertheless, the effect was on the whole disappointing. A large number, indeed much the larger proportion of them, were indistinguishable from the crowd with which they had mingled. It appeared pretty clear to him that the great majority of them were *completely cured*.

On inquiring of the eminent expert in Poetic Lunacy who filled the post of chief resident physician, and whose lower lip was a little swollen and bleeding slightly from a blow, he found that this was the actual fact. All but three or four of the cases, he was told, had already yielded to treatment ; and these three or four, added his informant, pointing to a group of poets singing loudly at a little distance, would have been sent next day to an asylum for Incurables.

"In fact," said the physician, with a somewhat forced smile, which was not rendered more natural or graceful by his wounded mouth, "it hardly seems worth while to have broken into a hospital for so little."

Some of the youths present raised a cry of "To the Asylums," but it was not taken up very heartily, and the crowd which moved off in the direction of the nearest asylum was but a small one, and returned empty-handed. For it was thought advisable before proceeding to extremities to ascertain the wishes of the inmates, and it was found that they were unanimous, to an Incurable, in favour of remaining where they were. They were so thoroughly convinced, they said, of the now hopelessly prosaicised

character of that world of men from which they had so long been secluded, that they preferred to end their days in the company of their own thoughts, and of their criticisms of each other.

Such were the first disenchantments of Vicesimus since his awakening—but, alas ! there were many worse in store for him. He had yet to learn of what refinement of cruelty the goddess of his adoration was capable when she descended, an ironical Diana upon an inadequate Endymion, to touch the sleeping eyes of an essentially prosaic young Age.

For she had touched his eyes only, and not his lips ; and in many a bitter hour of mute or stammering struggle did he learn how heavy was the curse of denial which had accompanied the blessing of the gift.

Everywhere he sought the radiant vision which had once revealed itself to him—everywhere and always : on the mountain, and in the meadow ; in the nestling hamlet, and in the lonely glen ; by the sound of waters, and in the deepest stillness of the woods ; at sunset, and at moonrise ; and then most of all,—then when he could almost feel her breath in the dawn-wind, and hear her voice in the first twitter of the birds,—at the hour of daybreak. But never again did he see her face to face. He knew, he felt, that, if only he could do so, she would redeem the blessing from the curse ; that she who had opened his eyes would then also unseal his lips ; that the thoughts with which his bosom was bursting would find a vent, and that the dumb yearnings which would not let him rest would be stilled.

And many and many a time did he dream that she was on the point of appearing to him, of speaking to him, of

once more touching him with her benignant hand. Many and many a time had he turned cold in the twilight at what he thought was the rustle of her robe ; many a time and oft had his heart stood still at her fancied whisper in his ear. But he saw nothing—nothing but the world of beauty and mystery to which she had opened his eyes ; heard nothing but the imprisoned voice within him wailing distantly for release ; felt nothing but the old, eternal, speechless pain.

And then for a season his anguish would become too great to be borne. His passionate prayers to the adored and fugitive goddess would well-nigh rise to the fury of an imprecation against her who had troubled thus cruelly his brute repose ; who had grafted the longings of the immortal upon the powers of the child ; who had taken from him the tranquillity of the sightless only to condemn him to the agony of the dumb. But even at this moment, when his madness reached its highest—at the moment when he was about to curse at once the giver and the gift, the peace of Nature would descend upon him, and his longings would die away like the fretful sobs of an infant ; and with a shudder at the blasphemy which had trembled on his lips, and a blessing upon her who had unveiled to him the face of his Mother, unknowable and unspeakable though she were, and ever might be, he would sink to sleep.

From all which, however, it will be seen that Poesy incurred a serious responsibility when she descended, an ironical Diana upon an inadequate Endymion, to touch the sleeping eyes of an essentially prosaic young Age.

But, in the meantime, how fared it with his children ?—

with the children into whom he had breathed some of his own adoration of Poesy, without any of that faculty of expression which, alas ! was not his to communicate ?

Well, some few of them had as bad a time of it as himself. They longed as ardently as he to master the divine language, and strove as vainly with their task, and suffered as acutely from their failure.

But with the others it was different. They promptly and complacently invented a jargon of their own, and,—in order that they might be disturbed by no misgivings on the matter,—assured each other once a week, and sometimes oftener, that it was really and truly the divine language. They sighed like furnaces all over the country, and composed ballads to the eyebrow of Poesy, which were undoubtedly woeful if nothing else ; and as most of them, unlike Vicesimus, had never even seen the goddess whose eyebrow they celebrated, they had naturally no reason for doubting the merit of any particular ballad, or for suspecting it to be unworthy of its subject or unfaithful to its original.

This was the reply to Poesy of the children of a prosaic young Age ; and in the course of time, by dint of the invariable law of interaction, it began to exert a reflected influence on the prosaic young Age himself. As the ardour of his worship abated with maturing years, and the echoes of the true though imprisoned voice within him grew fainter and fainter, and became at last inaudible, Vicesimus began, he too, to sigh like a furnace, and to compose ballads to the eyebrow of Poesy, and finally got to believe that they were the genuine thing.

But not for long. He had other children besides the

poetasters—hardy, sturdy, action-loving, commonplace children, conscious of their prosaic origin, and proud of it ; and their influence was from the first a competing one with the other. It did not, of course, avail to reveal to Vicesimus the spiritual inadequacy of his own and his other children's attempts at poetry, but it inspired him by degrees with an intellectual contempt for their weakness. He longed for something in the poetic order, which, if not divine, should at least be vigorously human—for something strong, manly, and robust. If that was not to be attained by him or by his children, then away with art for ever, and welcome the life of action !

But there was still an element of hope remaining. There was a poetry of action, as there was a poetry of thought and of emotion. What had the drama been doing during all those years of woeful ballad-making and imitations of the furnace ?

“What has the drama been doing ?” echoed Time, who at this moment appeared unbidden at Vicesimus's side, “Come with me and I will show you.”

“Has it degenerated into mere word-spinning, like lyric poetry ?” asked Vicesimus, as he prepared to follow his guide.

“Oh no !” said Time. “I can't exactly say that. It does not suffer from an excess of manner like other forms of poetic literature. Indeed it rather despises style and the arts of language altogether. You can see that from the history it has gone through. Just before Old Seekleham expired, the realistic drama got to be so overrun with stage directions that they ate up the text ; and then a new school arose, which started with the principle that the highest form

of dramatic literature was dumb show. However, the mute drama only lasted a few years, after which they found it necessary to go back to words again. There was nobody, I suppose, with enough literary gift to keep the other style going. But ever since then the question of manner has ceased to interest, and everything now turns on matter. And a precious turn things have taken in that respect," he added, with a laugh.

"Indeed!" said Vicesimus.

"Yes!" said Time, "it was the Realists' doing. They carried their principles to such a pitch that they provoked a Sentimental Reaction which—but here we are."

And Vicesimus found himself, side by side with his conductor, in a well-appointed study, where, unseen by its occupants, a youth and an old man, he listened with disgust and amazement to the following

COLLOQUY OF INGENUUS AND THE AGED DRAMATIST.

"Yes, Ingenuus," said his venerable companion, smiling, "you may indeed be thankful that you were born in a happier age than your parents. You would hardly have enjoyed your visit to the theatre so much last night had your youth been spent under the same conditions as mine. Ah! *Othello*, or rather *Virtue Triumphant*,—for though I say it that shouldn't, perhaps, the second title is more to my liking,—was a very different play then."

"Dear Uncle," said the youth admiringly, "how much the world owes to you for having remodelled the *dénouement* of that now delightful drama! Yet, to us of the present day, it seems hard to realise the idea that it could ever have ended otherwise than with the beautiful scene of mutual

reconciliation that you wrote for it—so humane, so hopeful, so satisfactory all round. Indeed, indeed, we owe you much."

"Nay," replied the old man modestly. "It was no great merit of mine, after all. Like all reformers, I found my most powerful ally in the monstrous growth of the evil which I attacked. It was the excesses of pessimism twenty years ago that made inevitable the reaction which I led. Perhaps if the pessimists had left *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* alone, we should never have got a hearing for the first product of that reaction, the play which prepared the way for the *Lear*, the *Romeo and Juliet*, and that most successful of my revisions, the drama you saw last night."

"The first product of the reaction?" said Ingenuus, inquiringly. "I am not quite sure that I know what that was."

"It was my *Shylock; or, The Forgiving Jew*," replied the aged dramatist. "And, as I have said, I doubt whether I should have found a public so prepared to accept it had it not been for the extravagant fashion in which pessimistic Realism had dealt with *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*."

"But is it possible, dear sir," said the youth, "that pessimistic Realism found anything to complain of in the original Shakspearean form of those two dramas?"

"Indeed, it is possible," was the answer. "The conclusion of *Hamlet* in particular gave great offence to the Realists. They were shocked at the extreme clumsiness of the arrangement whereby the Prince and Laertes exchange foils, and they pointed out—I own with some force—that a complete failure to avenge his father's death would be more in keeping with Hamlet's irresolute and unpractical character

than the tardy and doubtful success which attends his efforts. Hence, in their later version of the play, they made him fall to the ground completely paralysed by the wound from the poisoned foil, and expire in great agony without being able to communicate his secret to any one but Horatio, who intimates by a meaning glance at Claudius, as the curtain falls, that he intends to use it for purposes of *chantage*."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Ingenuus, "that was a dreary *dénouement* indeed."

"Was it not?" said the Shakspearean reviser. "But I almost think that the end of *Macbeth* was made more depressing even than that."

"Indeed! you surprise me. And how?"

"Well, the Realists declared, you see, that a superstitious coward such as Macbeth was would have collapsed at once on hearing that the juggling fiend had 'paltered with him in a double sense.' Indeed he does, if you remember, say to Macduff, 'I'll not fight with thee!'"

"True, but Macduff replies,

"Then yield thee, coward,—
And live to be the show and gaze o' the time:
We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
Painted upon a pole, and underwrit,
"Here may you see the tyrant."

Upon which Macbeth indignantly rejects the proposal, and bids Macduff 'lay on.'

"Exactly! Well, the Realists made him accept the proposal. In their version he surrenders, and consents to become the show and gaze o' the time; stipulating only—a condition to which Macduff, at the instance of Malcolm,

reluctantly accedes—that rotten eggs and other missiles shall be barred. The curtain falls—and a very effective ‘curtain’ it was thought in those days—on the entrance of the painters who have come to paint him upon a pole.”

“And that was actually the end of the play?”

“Scenically speaking, it was; though there was a hint in the closing lines of the dialogue that Macduff, elated by his conquest over the usurper, had formed the ambitious design of murdering Malcolm, and founding a military despotism in Scotland, with himself as the first military despot.”

“I do not wonder,” exclaimed Ingenuus, “that drama of this depressing sort should have led to a revolt, and that the public mind should soon have been filled with an eager longing for something more cheerful, more human—since human nature, after all, is cheerful if left to itself—than this wretched stuff.”

“Not with so eager a longing, either,” said the old man, a little nettled at finding that the influence of the “natural reaction” was in danger of being, as he thought, exaggerated at the expense of his own credit. “I had to educate the public into a taste for my Shakspearean revisions, and I was obliged to do it by degrees. I began, as you know, with the *Merchant of Venice*, and pointed out how absurd it was to describe as a ‘comedy’ a play which turns on the dishonest defraudation of a Jew who has been previously robbed and deserted by his daughter. Do you recollect the passage in the Trial Scene in which Portia pronounces judgment? It is there that my revision begins. Shall I recall it to you?”

“Pray do so,” said Ingenuus, eagerly. “I should like it of all things.”

"You remember, then, that speech of Portia's which ends with the words—

'Nay, if the scale do turn
But in the estimation of a hair,
Thou diest ; and all thy goods are confiscate.'

Well, my version continues thus :—

ANT. Nay, learned doctor, but this must not be.
Take my good thanks, I know thou meanest well,
But who saith flesh, saith blood : 'tis even so
In lay and commonon parlance of the time,
And shall the law say other ? God forbid !
For law that useth not the people's speech,
But wraps itself in quirks, and grows astute
With sleight of words to eatch unwary men
In pitfalls, is a danger and a curse.

POR. Noble Antonio—

ANT. Prithee, by your leave
Bear with me ; I have little more to say.
I hunger not for death, yet would I scorn
To owe the sherd and scantlings of a life
To trick of plea or clerkly subtlety.
Shylock, approach ! behold my bosom bared !
Nay, start not ! It is thine, thy thing, thy pledge.
Take it, foreclose upon my mortgaged flesh.
Issue *elegit* on this realty
Of skin and nerves, yea ! on this fair demesne
That here extended lies, awaiting writ,
This poor, pale surety of its bankrupt lord.
To't then ! Be speedy ! Carve thy penalty !

POR. Why doth the Jew pause ? Take thy forfeiture.

"I see," said Ingenuus, "that you retain the language of the original wherever it is possible."

"Precisely so," said the dramatist. "I worked in a spirit of reverence for my author.

SHY. [Raising his arm, then suddenly lowering it.]

I will—I—'tis in vain ! I cannot strike !
 Antonio, thou hast conquered. Lo, I yield !
 My wrath hath fizzled out, and that fierce hate
 I bore towards the Gentile name and race
 Hath, at the cooling breath of thy reproof,
 Turned all to concord and sweet amity.
 Now in my breast there springs the better thought
 That 'twere a burning shame and foul reproach
 To Israel if one of Gentile blood
 Should in nobility outdo a Jew.
 That shall not be, God willing. Here I rend
 The bond that bindeth thee, Antonio. [He tears the bond.
 Away, ye two stern judges of my claim!

[He flings away the scales.

And thou, their horrid beadle ! [He flings away the knife.
 I will ask

No penalty, no forfeit, no escheat.
 Give me my principal—with interest
 At five per cent. per month—and let me go.

BAS. O gentle Jew !

DUKE. O strange !

GRA. O Gentile Jew !

Good Shylock, I had hatched a merry jest
 To fling at thee, but shall not get it off.
 Me thou hast conquered, as Antonio thee !

SHY. The cash ! I would be jogging !

POR. Tarry, Jew,—

And here," said the dramatist, looking up from the book, "I have introduced bodily the whole of Portia's next speech, in which she points out to Shylock that he has brought himself within the penalty of the law which enacts that he who seeks the life of any citizen shall forfeit half his goods to the threatened party, and the other half to the State. Whereupon Antonio cuts in again, addressing Portia—

Your pardon, sir, but that may never be.
 Law cannot punish what the law directs,
 Nor Justice scourge her plaintiffs, howsoe'er
 Perversely in the right. Bethink thee, too,
 The Jew sought not my life save while he deemed
 That I resisted his most righteous claim:
 Whatever scheme he harboured was renounced
 On my submission, and his bosom's floor
 Was with the fan of pity throughly purged
 When to his better feelings I appealed.
 And give me leave, sir doctor, to observe
 That all the burden of this usurer's faults,
 His spite and over-reaching lust, descends
 On thee, that in the very novelty
 And freshness of his noble deed canst strive
 To catch his feet in quillets. Fie on us!
 If we, with all our Christian privileges,
 Are worse than Ebrews.

POR. Merchant, thou art right,
 And thy reproof hath cut me to the heart.
 For it doth wound more than the Christian in me,
 It smites the woman. I am Portia.

BAS. O day and night ! The lady Portia !

POR. Ay.
 And this, Nerissa !

GRA. Father Abraham!
 Your pardon, Jew ! No Gentile oath will serve.
 POR. And here I lay aside my doctor's robe,
 Abashed and overcrowded by Shylock's deed,
 Antonio's words, and my own fatal lack
 Of moral sense. So let my sisters all
 Be taught of Portia that they strive no more
 With men in the professions, least of all
 Compete with them in practice of the law ;
 Seeing that woman, fair in all things else,
 Is never fair in play, and once engaged
 In the sharp battle of the courts, and hot
 With thirst of victory, as a general rule
 Would stoop to sharper practice than a man."

"Dear me!" interrupted Ingenuus. "Wasn't that rather a risky passage?"

"Not at all," was the reply. "It just caught the audience at the very top of the reaction against the Woman's Movement. It was cheered to the echo. But don't interrupt. I am almost at the end."

DUKE. Ay, but no woman is the State, nor I
That rule it, and the State shall do thee right,
Shylock, thou much abused and injured man !
From this day forth I do release thee quite
From all the civil disabilities
Of Jewish blood. Thou shalt deliver up
Thy badge of sufferage to be cancelled. None
On the Rialto, no, nor otherwhere
Within our city, shall assault thee more ;
None taunt thee with thy trade, or tweak thy nose,
Or spit upon thy Jewish gabardine.
Thy daughter shall restore thee what she took,
And young Lorenzo shall to prison straight,
There to abide the judgment meted out
By law to the receiver of stolen goods.
Nor shall he clear himself till he redeem
The turquoise that thou had'st of Leah. Ay,
He shall give back thy ring, or, in its place,
A wilderness of monkeys : rest content.
Meanwhile, the story, Shylock, of thy wrongs
And how thou did'st o'erlook them, and ignore,
Shall on the city's archives be inscribed
With laud deserved. So that all aftertime
May keep the memory of the thing, and know
How better far it is to spare than smite,
How much forgiveness doth surpass revenge."

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Ingenuus with unfeigned enthusiasm. "So Shakspearean in manner, and yet so thoroughly up to date in sentiment."

" You think it Shakspearean ? " said the old man, gratified.

" Most distinctly so," was the reply. " Look at these lines,—

' Nay, start not ! It is thine, thy thing, thy pledge,
Take it, foreclose upon my mortgaged flesh.
Issue *elegit* on this realty
Of skin and nerves.' "

" Yes," murmured the other complacently, " that was to show Shakspeare's knowledge of legal technicalities. I am, you know, a believer in the theory that he devilled for Bacon when the future Lord Keeper was at the bar."

" Yes," exclaimed Ingenuus, " and the rest of the passage,—

' Yea, on this fair demesne
That here extended lies awaiting writ,
The poor pale surety of its bankrupt lord.'

Or this again—

' His bosom's floor
Was with the fan of pity throughly purged.'

Eminently Shakspearean ! "

" Ye-es," said the other a little doubtfully, " but the next line,—

' When to his better feelings I appealed.'

And later on—

' If we with all our Christian privileges.'

Do those lines strike you as equally Shakspearean ? They sound to me just a little modern and commonplace, and I don't feel quite sure that there are not a few more blemishes of the same kind, especially in Portia's last speech, and here and there in the concluding address of the Duke."

" I didn't notice any," said Ingenuus, who was thoroughly

imbued with that noblest characteristic of the culture of his period—its indifference to faults in the execution of any work of art, so long as it inculcated a sound moral lesson. “It seemed to me exactly what Shakspeare would have written throughout, except that it was animated by a far broader humanity than Shakspeare was capable of feeling. But beautiful as your *Shylock* is, I think it is surpassed by that lovely and imposing tragedy I saw last night. Yes ! *Othello ; or, Virtue Triumphant*, is your masterpiece.”

“I believe it is generally so considered,” said the Dramatist bashfully:

“What a magnificent situation is that where Othello, with his arm upraised, at the words,

‘By the throat I took the circumcised dog,
And smote him,’

and just about to descend and bury the knife in his heart at the word ‘thus,’ is suddenly spell-bound by hearing once more the faint notes of the Willow Song. It is the most thrilling moment that I know of in the whole of English drama.”

“Yes, the situation has merits !” said its inventor, his withered cheek illumined by a faint blush.

“And then the fine concluding scene that follows !” exclaimed his companion excitedly, snatching up the Revised Shakespeare and beginning to read.

‘OTH. O Desdemona ! Desdemona ! living !
O ! O ! O !’ ”

“Note,” said the Dramatist parenthetically, “the reverence of the treatment. Except for the alteration of the word ‘dead’ to ‘living.’ I have strictly followed the text.

MON. Livest thou, gracious lady ?

DES. Ay, fair sir.

And by the grace of Heaven many a year
Shall live to cure the madness of my lord
With love's sweet hellebore. To yonder pillow,
Wherewith his frenzy would have stifled out
My innocent life, I owe it that I live.
For it is an air-cushion, giving back
The aliment it took, a kindly foe
To the beleaguered fortress of my breath,
That fed the garrison its siege had starved.
So lay I feigning death, and then, anon,
As soon as my dear lord had turned his back,
I flung it off.

OTH. Sweet chuck !

IAGO. I am amazed.

Nor know I whether my perplexèd heels
Tread down the firm-based earth, or raised aloft
Stare upward and affront the hovering moon.

GRA. That shalt thou know full soon, thou spawn of hell !
General, take order with him, that his doom
Be short and sharp.

DES. Nay, uncle, let me speak !
I fain would plead for him whose bolt hath failed
To reach its sighted victim, and recoils,
An ill-thrown boomerang, upon his head.
Spare him, Othello ! let him go his way.
Mar not the joy of our recovered loves
With deeds of vengeance visited on one
Who did but act according to his kind.

OTH. Angel of grace, thou sayest well. His guilt
May be but his inheritance. Iago
Approach, thou demi-devil.

IAGO. Noble Moor——

OTH. Nay, never hang thy head ! We are but men,
And thou didst only what thy nature bade.
Ancient, look up !

IAGO. Nay, prithee ask me not,
For needs must that I commune with the ground

Whereon my sin lies painted evermore
In portraiture of blood.

OTH. It is not so,
I pray you do not so consider of it,
My wife yet lives.

IAGO. Ay, General, but mine own ?
My fair Emilia ! O, I have slain
The dearest she that ever blest a he.
I will betake me to a monastery,
And there with penance and with prayer atone
For blood.

EMIL. [Rising.] Nay, not for mine !

IAGO. Emilia !

EMIL. Take heart, Iago ! thou hast harmed me not,
The rib thou smotest was not mine—nor thine—
'Twas but my corset's. I am whole and sound !

IAGO. The saints be praised ! For of my blackest crime
I am at least assoilzied. Yet, farewell;
It still is fitting that I take the vows
For guilt unpurged. I murdered Roderigo.

MON. Roderigo !

IAGO. Ay ! Together we did plan
Assault on Cassio, and young empty-pate
Being by him he made at shrewdly hurt,
And lying wounded, I, for that I feared
His blabbing tongue, despatched him. Rest his soul !
He had his qualities : and albeit a snipe,
I do repent me that I took his life.

Enter RODERIGO.

RODERIGO. Say that thou tried'st to take it, ancient.

IAGO. Ha !

ROD. Honest Iago, I did know thee better
Than thou did'st wot of, and did never care
To trust thee further than the eye can reach.
Wherfore, when I went Cassio-hunting with thee,
I wore a shirt of mail from which thy point
Turned blunted. I have not a scratch.

DES. Good youth,
I do rejoice with thee.

OTH. But see Iago,

I How straitly he doth still peruse the earth.
 What ails thee, man? What else hast thou to purge?
 Speak!

AGO. I have wounded Cassio in the leg.
 And to a monastery must retire.

Enter CASSIO.

CASSIO. Not so. 'Twas in a portion of the limb
 Which was, yet was not, parcel of myself.
 For the divinity which shapes our ends
 Did fashion mine in such wise that for me
 'Tis meet I plump them out. Thus did thy blow
 Fall harmless, striking that which none can kill,
 An artificially fatted calf.

OTH. This is good news, lieutenant. Now, by heaven!
 Thou shalt be officer of mine again.
 I did suspect thee rashly.

CAS. General,
 Rashly is scarce the word. I do not think
 I am exaggerating when I say
 That all the evidence whereby my guilt
 Was proved to thee, and on the which thou gav'st
 Iago orders for my taking off,
 Would not suffice the lightest dairy wench
 That cuffs a cat for stealing of her cream.

OTH. I do confess it, and I ask thy pardon.

CAS. To thee, as free as to thine ancient there,
 I grant it.

OTH. Ha! 'tis well. Now let us in!
 And with a rousing catch awake the night!
 For all goes smoothly now which was so crost,
 And virtue wins which had so well-nigh lost."

"What do you think of that?" asked Time, as the aged Dramatist ceased reading, and the youth stooped reverently to kiss his hand.

"Think!" replied Vicesimus, with a disgust too deep for words. "No more drama for me! I am evidently neither a poetic nor a dramatic Age.

IV.

THE FOURTH AGE.

“Then, a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon’s mouth.”

POETRY, meaning thereby the art of giving adequate expression to the poetic emotion, is a very frail and delicate product of the human mind. It is reared with difficulty and dies easily. Not so that substitute for poetry which the prosaic invent for themselves: that is a hardy perennial indeed. Nothing kills it: neither the blasts of contemptuous criticism, nor the frosts of utter neglect. It not only thrives, but thrives best, in the lightest and shallowest soils; and after the exhaustion of everything in the human mind which corresponds to the chemical constituents necessary to successful agriculture, it continues to reproduce itself with an imperturbable fertility, and a supreme disdain for the principle of the rotation of crops.

Hence it must not be supposed that the discovery on the part of all the more intelligent spirits of this period that the Age was an incurably prosaic one, had any immediate effect in checking the production of verse. It was turned out, or ground out—either a flour mill or a

barrel organ will equally suit the metaphor—in the same enormous quantities, year by year. Fewer and fewer people paid any attention to it; but that made no difference. It was there if they wanted it, or should hereafter want it, and in the virtuous consciousness that they were making useful provision for a possible change in the public taste, the multitudinous manufacturers of the article continued placidly to produce it in a constant, and even—it was thought in some quarters—an increasing amount.

Still the restlessness which had made the bulk of mankind intolerant of it displayed a yet more rapid growth. It became clearer and clearer every day that civilised humanity had outgrown that age of “calf love” which, for the individual member of the species, finds its most characteristic expression in the hopeless attachment of a youth for a middle-aged woman, while with the race itself it takes the form of an equally desperate, and no less transient, passion for a now elderly Muse of Poetry. And just as the youth who has outgrown his adoration of the mature charmer very often takes to yachting, or big game shooting, or “ranching,” or globe-trotting, or to some other form of more or less energetic activity, so it happened at this juncture with the civilised human race. Action! action! action! was the Demosthenic exclamation—though not by any means in the same sense as the Athenian orator—on the lips of all. Their disgusted satiation with the exercise of their imaginative faculties did not send them back again to science: it impelled them to those forms of activity with which the brain, in any of its functions, should have as little as possible to do.

Of course, however, it is hardly necessary to say that

these various changes in the mood of civilised humanity assumed different degrees of importance in different nations. In all of them the scientific spirit had at first been strong. In some the subsequent revolt against it had been equally marked ; in others it was hardly felt at all. While one nation had remained tolerably loyal to its early traditions of scientific culture, and had only taken the poetic malady in a mild form, another had had that complaint badly, while a third had been ravaged by it to a positively calamitous extent. And the recovery from it exhibited corresponding features of difference. Here would be found a convalescent people which had taken refuge in science, and there another which had thrown off the poetic fever, not to relapse again into the somewhat lymphatic condition of a scientific community, but to pass into a state—hardly less febrile than that from which they had emerged—of insatiable activity.

Peoples in such a mood become the natural prey of the military spirit, and one immediate effect of the extinction of the imaginative and æsthetic impulses was the passing of a tremendous wave of militarism over the whole civilised world. The sighing lovers and the eyebrow-hymning ballad-mongers of a few years back became the swaggering swashbucklers of the newer time. They had had, of course, no more experience of actual warfare than Cassio, according to the assertion of his envious comrade ; but they made up for want of practical acquaintance with their subject by the copiousness of their theoretical knowledge. Enough remained to most of them of their old scientific habits to make them solicitous of technical accuracy, and they soon learned to use all the military terms of art which

had been in use from the days of Alexander downward, with unerring precision.

Vicesimus watched their proceedings with the liveliest sympathy, for in virtue of his own original impulse towards action, combined with the effect of their reacting influence upon him, he was himself more restless than any of them. His head ran incessantly on military matters, and he now affected a soldierly demeanour and style of dress, and a formidable cut of beard. He became touchy and quarrelsome in his intercourse with Time—who had now come back to him, not looking nearly so youthful, and with a disagreeable habit of “hanging heavily” on Vicesimus’s hands. He was continually rebuking his aged companion for some fancied slight, and would at these moments astonish him, even with his long experience of human inventiveness in the matter of expletives, by the exceeding strangeness of his oaths.

“Glory,” he would often declare, with many of these fancy imprecations, “is the only object worthy of man’s pursuit.”

“Humph! That’s rather a strange thing for *you* to say, isn’t it?” Time would observe on these occasions. “Now to me it seems rather an old-fashioned idea.”

“Old-fashioned!” exclaimed Vicesimus almost fiercely. “What in thunder do you mean? The love of fame is a natural instinct of humanity, implanted in the breast of mankind a score of ages before all this condemned and withered nonsense, this Tophet-born and Gehenna-begotten rubbish about the brotherhood of the race.”

“But, apart from the humanitarian aspect of the question, how does it look to the scientific eye? What has science to say to this propensity?”

"Science be inflated!" cried the other; "unless that, indeed, is a superfluous imprecation. Science had better mind its own scientific eye, I can tell it! The world is not going to sit at its feet for ever, and that is a thing that the most go-ahead of my sons will pretty soon explain to it. In another year or two they will be doing that in a very rough fashion, I expect."

"Indeed!" said Time.

"Yes, indeed!" replied Vicesimus. "One of the most active and adventurous of the races whom I am proud to own as my sons, is getting on worse and worse terms every year with one of the most scientific of them, and there must soon be a collision between the two. The sooner the better, *I* say. Yes, by the everlasting jingo! I should like nothing better than to see them have a brush with the sneaks."

"The sneaks won't fight, eh?" said he to whom so many exhausted fighters had failed to "come up."

"Not they," said his companion, contemptuously. "It seems impossible to kick them into the slightest display of spirit."

"Why don't you breathe some of your own into them?" asked Time, with a suspicion of irony.

"I have tried, and it's impossible. They are quite insensible to my influence. Or, rather," continued Vicesimus with a little confusion, "they are so absolutely subject to the influence that I exercised over them thirty years ago, that it is quite beyond my power to move them now. I made a scientific race of them when I was in my cradle, and now they seem hopelessly incapable of imbibing any of the adventurous and martial spirit that I am diffusing

over the rest of mankind. Well, they will have to go under ; that is all."

"Isn't that rather hard upon them ?"

"Not the least. Why hard? Serve them right for being behind the Age."

"But you are the Age, and it was you from whom, as you admit, they imbibed the scientific spirit."

"Yes, but I have moved on, and so must they, or take the consequences. Indeed, it is arguable whether I am the same 'I' that I was thirty years ago. The question of personal identity—but there! you must have a finite existence like my own to be able to understand that question. It is useless," he added, with a pitying glance at Time, "to attempt to explain it to a poor devil like yourself, whose whole associations are with the Infinite. Your consciousness must be a very vague, and misty, and unsatisfactory sort of a thing, *mon vieux*. However, it suits you, I suppose, so I don't know why *I* should bother my head about it. Meanwhile, I think I can promise you some amusement in a year or two. My Soldiers are getting more and more sudden and quick in quarrel every day, and it can't be long before they drag those wretched Scientists into the field by their very noses."

About eighteen months after this conversation, Time and Vicesimus stood side by side on a grassy knoll in the midst of a broad champaign in Central Europe. The latter was equipped with a powerful field-glass, and seemed in very high spirits.

"Here they come at last," he exclaimed excitedly, after a prolonged survey of the landscape through his glass

"That's the First Army Corps, the nearest to us ! over there, by the edge of the wood ! The Second, I expect, will come in sight in a minute or two in that direction, about seven miles to the left."

"Where is the Scientist army ?" asked Time.

"Well, if you can call the wretched thing an army at all, it is, I believe, about twenty miles away from here, behind that distant hill. With their ridiculous electric batteries, and their absurd flying machines, and their preposterous Army Asphyxiator, they might really quite as well have stayed at home."

"They wanted to, I believe—didn't they ?" asked Time, drily.

"Very much indeed," replied Vicesimus. "They diplomatised desperately to avoid this war—almost begged and prayed, in fact, to be let off their kicking. It was only when the crisis reached its acutest stage that they ventured upon anything like a threat : and then, what sort of a threat was it ? It reminded one of a desperate schoolboy uttering dark menaces of revenge upon his masters, which he means to carry out by laying a train, with sixpenn'orth of gunpowder, under the door of the fives court. They only vaguely warned their enemy that they had been studying the application of science to war with great assiduity for many years, and had brought the art of destruction to so high a pitch of—— There they are ! "

"Who ?" asked Time ; "the Scientists ?"

"The Scientists ! Pooh ! No, you will never see them. The Second Army Corps, there, rounding that spur of the hill between the river and that patch of corn-land. Gallant fellows ! they will face the two big micro-smitherine guns, I

warrant you, and pluck the ‘bubble reputation’ out of their very mouths. Do you make them out?”

“I did,” said Time; “but, somehow or other, I don’t now.”

He continued to gaze through the field-glass for a few moments, and then, turning to his companion, he observed: “It seems a funny thing to say, Vicesimus, but, do you know, I don’t think there is any Second Army Corps. Look for yourself;” and he handed the field-glass to his companion.

Vicesimus surveyed the distant landscape through it long and intently.

“You are quite right,” he said at last. “There *is* no Second Army Corps. Or, rather, to be strictly accurate,” he continued, after pursuing his investigations a little longer, “there is no longer any living body of men answering to that name. But if,” handing the glass back again to Time, “you will be good enough to examine closely the spot which was just now covered by a minute, insect-like, very slowly moving body, you will, I think, find its place filled by a dark, motionless mass of the same dimensions. That, I take it, is what remains of the Second Army Corps.”

“I agree with you,” said Time, after a short study of the point indicated. “And how do you explain the——”

“I offer,” said Vicesimus, “the conjectural explanation that the electrical machine has proved more successful than I anticipated. I suspect that the Scientists have found means of communicating to the Second Army Corps a life-destroying shock of electricity. But now let us turn our attention to the First Army Corps.”

This fine body of men were now within little more than

half a mile of them, and the sight of their waving banners, the sound of their martial music, and the glitter of the sun on their arms and accoutrements, had a most exhilarating effect.

"Look at them!" exclaimed Vicesimus with enthusiasm. "There is happiness for you, if you like: the only form in which man can really know it—the happiness which derives from life, and is yet independent of it, nay, finds its chiefest stimulus and sustainment in the very contempt of life. The Soldier is the only human being who has ever seized upon the philosophy of Stoic and Epicurean alike, and appropriated to himself whatever is good in both—the frank enjoyment of all that is pleasurable in existence, combined with the devotion to an end which is higher than existence. Look at those gay and jubilant thousands who are marching past us a few furlongs off. There is not one of those fellows who will not enjoy his camp-fire carouse this evening with a heartiness which no civilian could rival or even realise. Yet there is not one of them who, if he heard that there were to be no more camp-fire carouses for him, but that to-night there would begin for him the silent bivouac of eternity, would not receive the tidings with joy, if only they came accompanied with the promise that he would die in the achievement of some heroic and famous exploit, with the eyes of all his countrymen upon him and their praises ringing in his ears. Ah, the 'bubble reputation'! the 'bubble reputation'! How true it is that——"

"Is this it?" interrupted Time.

"Is this what?"

"The 'bubble reputation'? Look!"

As he spoke a species of *bulla*, of vast dimensions, but

propelled in some invisible fashion at a pace quite twenty times as fast as a balloon, came speeding towards the First Army Corps, and having arrived at a point exactly over them, stopped suddenly, hovered a moment, then descended rapidly, and burst noiselessly in their midst. Half a dozen of the nearest regiments fell flat on their faces like so many packs of cards, and others at a greater distance dropped their arms and staggered like drunken men.

"What do you make of that?" asked Time.

"The new destructive gas, I suppose," said Vicesimus, a little disconcerted. "The Patent Instantaneous Army Asphyxiator. I heard of it some time ago, but never thought there was anything in it."

"In that," said Time, surveying the prostrate soldiery through the field-glass, "in that you were clearly wrong. I think we may take it that it contains some gaseous compound of exceptionally potent properties. But here is a new arrival! What, pray, is this?"

As he spoke a singular-looking machine, apparently propelled by a system of revolving fans, was seen rapidly approaching through the air. It passed completely over the army, dropping dynamite, like sand from a balloon, as it swept above the masses of advancing men, ploughing a broad furrow through them as it went.

"That, I imagine," said Time, "is the new flying machine that you spoke of with so much contempt."

"New!" said Vicesimus, with some ill-humour, "it is not new. It was invented in Old Seeklham's days by a man of the name of Edison; but it has never been used before, and, as I say, I never believed it would work. However, of course if it will work there is no doubt that it is a handy

machine to have on a campaign, because you can start it from a distance of fifty miles."

"What's that?" exclaimed Time with a start, as a terrible sound struck his ear, and a huge projectile came shrieking through the air towards them.

"I suspect," said Vicesimus with deliberation, "that it is the micro-smitherine shell."

"Indeed," said Time, "so that works too, then! The Scientists are evidently no contemptible foes."

Before Vicesimus could reply, the mighty shell came hurtling through the air, and exploded with unerring accuracy over the advancing host, laying low another five hundred men. A second shell followed, and a third, and then a second visit from the flying machine, and then another from the Patent Army Asphyxiator, and then a dozen more of the explosive projectiles, each alighting with the same fatal precision on its mark and leaving the same tale of dead behind it.

There was no flinching on the part of the doomed soldiery. They plodded steadily on with dogged determination, but without a spark of enthusiasm, their officers encouraging them from time to time with the assurance that the apparently deadly aim of the enemy's guns was more a matter of luck than skill, and that in a little while they would find his fire becoming less destructive.

But that welcome experience was not destined to befall the unhappy men. The guns continued to be served with the same destructive effect, and in less than half an hour the First Army Corps was annihilated.

"How far off are those micro-smitherine guns, do you suppose?" asked Time. "Forty thousand yards?"

"At least that distance, as well as I can calculate!" was the reply.

"Ha!" said the other, "you don't have so far to go nowadays then to seek the 'bubble reputation.' It is to be found, it appears, at twenty miles from the cannon's mouth. That is if you ever get it at all. But will all those poor fellows—five score thousand of them—be famous for ever? A hundred thousand reputations. It seems impossible. Glory would become a drug."

"Time," said Vicesimus severely, for he was ill-pleased with the tone of his companion, "let us return home."

They bent their steps homeward, and walked on side by side for a few minutes in silence.

"Yet they were brave fellows," said Vicesimus, audibly pursuing his train of thought.

"Undoubtedly!" assented Time.

"Far braver in marching thus steadily against an invisible enemy than if they had seen him face to face."

"Beyond all question."

"And it certainly required no bravery to blow them up or asphyxiate them from a distance of twenty miles."

"None whatever."

"Well?" said Vicesimus.

"Well!" said Time.

Again they walked on for a few hundred yards without speaking.

"Time," said Vicesimus at last, "you have had considerable experience of life, and I have often heard you reason with a certain shrewdness from observed phenomena. Tell me candidly what lesson you think is to be drawn from the scene you have just witnessed."

"If you ask my candid opinion," said the other, "the lesson I am disposed to draw is this: that there is now no more place in the world for the virtue of military courage than there appears to be aptitude in it for the accomplishment of poetry."

His companion looked at him intently for a few moments, as though he would read his very soul.

"I am beholden to you," said he, "for your candour, and will be equally frank with you. I am very much of your opinion on that matter."

V.

THE FIFTH AGE.

“ And then, the justice,
In fair round belly, with good capon lined,
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws, and modern instances ;
And so he plays his part.”

THE military career is not, of course, the only outlet for the physical energies of the human race, or the only form of fulfilment which man’s inward impulse to action can discover for itself. But it is, and always has been, one of the most important ; and at the particular period at which it ceased, from the causes detailed, to supply this satisfaction, there were few other resources open to the man of active and adventurous instincts. Such were scarcely even to be found upon that home of adventure and activity—the sea. All the ironclad navies of the world had by this time destroyed each other, and maritime warfare had consequently fallen into disuse. Nearly all the big game had been extirpated before the humanitarian spirit had led to the total abandonment of field sports ; and Vicesimus himself had had the honour of capturing the last polar bear—by kindness—at the foot of the structure from which it takes its name. Central Africa had been thoroughly explored, and its inhabitants civilised with remorseless severity. There were no in-

accessible mountain peaks in any part of the world, and all but the very highest were served by well-appointed and extensively patronised railways. And even those which could not be ascended in this way were so abundantly supplied with ropes, chains, ladders, huts, automatic luncheon-pillars, and other appliances of civilisation, that there ceased to be any merit of adventure in scaling them. Yachting in bad weather remained almost the only amusement which any man with a taste for excitement, and a delight in the exercise of the virtue of courage, and the faculties of vigilance and resource, would care to indulge in ; and for many years Vicesimus passed part of his life upon the sea. On land, if it was difficult to find danger it was at least easy to get activity ; and incessant activity in hard physical exercise was almost as good an anodyne as danger for the malady of thought. Vicesimus, in common with those of his sons who took after their father, applied it steadily and persistently until close upon his fiftieth year.

As he approached that age he felt his physical energies unmistakably slackening, and was sensible therewith of a growing abatement of the impulse towards their exercise. But he felt at the same time, and not a little to his surprise, that a new contentment had been born within him. He looked back upon the phases of life through which he had passed, upon the mental habitudes and emotional moods which had once been his, with the astonished perception that he understood them for the first time. His severely scientific boyhood, his passionate and poetic youth, were gone for ever ; he would never again think the thoughts of the former period, or feel with the feelings of the latter ;

but he found, to his astonishment and tranquil pleasure, that a power over them had been given to him which in the days when those thoughts and feelings were still possible to him he never had possessed. His detachment from them had brought him this compensation, that he could survey them critically, but still with sympathy and appreciation, from without. Every day Vicesimus became calmer, more comfortable, more optimistic. His relations with Time once more assumed a satisfactory shape. Vicesimus found his companionship generally agreeable, and his pace for the most part accommodating. There was no longer the old necessity for either entreating him to go slower, or for "putting him along" with those passionate exhortations which the Western American addresses to his mule.

Somewhat, too, to the surprise of this now ripe Middle Age, his love of poetry, and of art in general, not only revived, but after a little while began to glow again with a sort of mild autumnal radiance in his breast. It had not the freshness of his springtime yearning, nor the fierceness of his summer passion, but it was none the less sweet—nay, it was, perhaps, almost the sweeter to him for that. It might have been a mere effect of advancing years, and possibly of growing intellectual egotism; but his present mood seemed to him altogether preferable to that through which he had passed in youth, and he would hardly have exchanged his placid, full-orbed, all-embracing contemplation of the mental image of his once adored goddess, even for a second actual vision of her as on the day when she had unsealed his eyes.

He would often discuss with Time this change which had taken place in himself; and Time, without the slightest

hesitation, appropriated to himself the entire credit of it. Vicesimus never disputed the point with him, being, indeed, inclined to think that the boast was on the whole justified.

He was more interested than ever in his children, or rather the children of his infancy, and very curious to see whether the course of their mental and spiritual growth had been the same as his own. They had of late ceased to influence him to the same extent as formerly, and he was afraid that the experience might have been mutual. His researches on this point, however, led to results which he considered very satisfactory, and which he soon felt a strong desire to communicate to his companion.

"Time," he said one day, "you were good enough to show me the Typical Baby. I should like to return the compliment by showing you the Typical Middle-Aged Man."

Therewith he conducted him to a library, somewhat resembling that in which they had heard the venerable Dramatist read his Shakspearean revisions to his nephew, only that it contained a good many more books, and there were no busts of its owner.

"There," said Vicesimus, pointing with some pride to a figure seated at the writing table ; "there you have him ! That is the Typical Middle-Aged Man."

The person indicated was beyond doubt middle-aged, and he possessed another characteristic, which, if not exactly typical of the middle-aged, is not uncommon among them. That portion of his body which lay below the fourth button of his waistcoat was nobly developed, and had it been a torso (instead of an abdomen) would have

dangerously challenged the supremacy of the Farnese Hercules. His somewhat formally-cut beard was already streaked with grey, and, but for a certain touch of severity in his eye, his face was not an ungenial one.

A vast pile of volumes lay heaped on the table before him, and he was engaged at the moment in passing a large paper-knife between the leaves of one after another of them, and drawing the instrument, after each introduction and withdrawal of it, gently under his nostrils.

"Oh!" exclaimed Time, in a tone of slight disappointment, "a critic! So that is your Typical Middle-Aged Man."

"Yes," said Vicesimus complacently, "it is said that every man at fifty is either a fool or a physician. The critic is the physician of the mental, moral, and spiritual life, and every man whose life-history has been mentally, morally, and spiritually a healthy one, ought by that age, if he is not a fool, to be a fully competent judge of these various sorts of health, and of the best modes of preserving them in himself and others."

"He seems in fair bodily health," said Time; "except, perhaps, for a slight tendency to corpulence."

"The result of his sedentary habits," said the other.

"Yes, and of a diet no doubt generous as his criticisms."

"Possibly," was the reply; "and as just, also, from another point of view. In fact, it is Shakspeare's own justice: 'In fair round belly, with good capon lined.'"

"Chicken and champagne," muttered Time, too low to be heard. "But am I to understand," he continued, in a louder tone, "that every middle-aged man is a critic?"

"Of life, yes!" replied Vicesimus; "and for the reasons I have just given you. As to literature, that, of course, depends upon circumstances."

"Upon what circumstances?"

"Well, upon the circumstance of his having literary tastes."

"And I suppose upon his possessing, or thinking he possesses, the critical faculty—the capacity of judging what is good or bad in letters?"

"Yes, upon his thinking so; that is all. If he thinks himself a literary critic, he is one."

"Why so?" inquired Time.

"Because, to be mistaken on such a point, he would have to be an incompetent critic of life and human nature, as personified in himself. And this, I have already said, it is impossible for the Middle-Aged Man to be."

"I see!" said Time. Then, after a moment's reflection, he added, "You mean always supposing him not to be a Middle-Aged Ass?"

"Exactly," replied Vicesimus; "always supposing him not to be a Middle-Aged Ass."

"Let us sum up a little," continued the other. "Your position, as I understand it, is this: that any man of good intelligence—"

"And who trains it properly!" interjected his companion.

"And who trains it properly, will by the time he attains middle-age have become a competent critic of life; and therefore, also—if in his mature judgment he believes himself to be such—a competent critic of literature."

"That" said Vicesimus, "is exactly my position."

"It appears impregnable," said Time, in a musing tone. "My only difficulty in connection with it is to know where the incompetent critics come from."

"I see no difficulty," was the reply. "They consist entirely of young men whose judgments are not yet matured, and of middle-aged men whose intelligence is either not good, or who have not properly trained it. It is from these two classes that the incompetent critics are drawn; or, at least, from these and one other."

"And that is?"

"The reviewers of books," said Vicesimus. "I must admit that they supply a certain contingent—indeed, perhaps, the majority—of incompetent critics; and it will not do, therefore, to leave them completely out of account. But enough of literary criticism, to which you seem to attach extraordinary importance, though literature is surely only a fragment, and not a very important fragment, of human life. To be a judge of men and women is a far greater thing than to be a judge of books."

"Yes," said Time, drily, "you have explained, and at some length, that it is the greater which includes the less. But then the less happens to be the easier art to practise. I should imagine that any literary critic, furnished with a certain equipment of fixed principles—the 'wise saws' of his art—and possessing a fair acquaintance with modern instances of their application, could play his part creditably enough. Don't you think so?"

"No doubt! no doubt!" replied Vicesimus, somewhat absently, for his thoughts had wandered away from literature to life. "But," added he, recovering himself, "it is absurd to appeal to me to confirm you on such a point; you, the

greatest critic—nay, the one unerring critic—of literature in the world."

Time did not reject the compliment, but he was unable to acknowledge it; for his companion had again relapsed into reverie, and was evidently unconscious of his existence.

Thus then had commenced the period which Vicesimus, studying it in the persons of his middle-aged children, and feeling it with their feelings, recognised both during its course and, with still more clearness, at its close, as the happiest of his life. It was not of many years' duration; it was, indeed, the shortest of all the stages, with perhaps the single exception of infancy, into which that life had been divided: shorter than his restless boyhood, shorter than his dreamy and romantic youth, shorter far than his active and adventurous prime.

He enjoyed it—not keenly, it is true; but calmly, amply, equably, without fluctuation of spirits or reactions of mood.

Nor was it till afterwards that he discovered it to have been founded on illusion, and learned that, critic of life and human nature as he fancied himself, he had started from a fundamental misconception of his real attitude towards the world around him—a radical error in the interpretation of his own moral and mental state.

He had fancied that his happiness arose from purely spiritual sources; that it was that of the philosopher who had outgrown the dominion of the passions, and had found perfect contentment in contemplation.

He had yet to learn how large a part of that contentment still depended upon material conditions which were year by year undergoing insensible transformation; how much of

it was derived from the very survival of those physical appetites which he had fancied extinct, but which, though they had ceased to tyrannise over life, remained to give it warmth and colour, and variety and animation.

In a word, he had yet to learn that the happiness he had experienced did not hail, as he imagined, from the Porch of Zeno, but from the Garden of Epicurus ; that it was not due to the conquest of the material by the spiritual part of him, but to a perfect, if temporary, balance of the two. He was to discover that the declining powers of the body, and the still strengthening faculties of the intellect, had reached —the former in their descent, the latter in their ascent—the same level, and that it was from the transitory realisation of his whole being, on its physical and intellectual side alike, that he derived that strange satisfaction, falsely supposed by him to be philosophical, which had filled the too brief period of his middle age.

With his children, this was at longest but a matter of a few years, and it might be abridged by one or other of two causes. With some of them, the passions took so long to abate into mere appetites that old age overtook them before that abatement was accomplished ; and they even, in certain cases, remained the foolish slaves of their youthful lusts to the day of their deaths. With others, the disappearance of the appetites themselves after their succession to the passions was abnormally rapid. But, even in the happiest cases of all, a short decade saw the period out from beginning to end.

It lasted longer with Vicesimus, in right of the hundred years of life which he was destined to achieve. The melancholy hour which sounded for all of them before

their sixtieth year, was for him delayed till close upon his seventieth.

But it struck at last, and, with the same clearness with which the same sad conviction had been carried home to his children, it was borne in upon Vicesimus that he had grown old.

VI.

THE SIXTH AGE.

“The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side ;
His youthful hose well sav'd, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank ; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound.”

MANY people are so heartless or so thoughtless—for no doubt this is one of those evils which are more often wrought by want of thought than want of heart—that it never occurs to them to consider how a Century may suffer as it grows old. To them, for all the freedom with which they personify it, it is a mere abstraction. They talk of the spirit of the Age, and the wants of the Age, and the conquests of the Age, and the weaknesses of the Age, yet without any apparent consciousness that they are speaking of a real entity, or using anything more than a convenient form of words to express the sum of the human beings on the earth at any given moment. So feeble is the imagination of the average man that he can hardly be expected to realise a Century to himself as “a pantaloon” or as “lean and slippered.” To represent it to the mind with spectacles on its nose, a pouch at its side, and its legs clothed in an unbecomingly loose pair of trousers, would strike him

probably as a daring flight of anthropomorphism, from which he would shrink back in alarm.

"This description," he would say, "may apply very well to the children of Vicesimus born immediately after his own birth. They, of course, have by this time become old. Their eyesight is failing, their legs are possibly wasting, their voices may be beginning to show signs of age, but to attribute these material and physical changes to a Century is to talk nonsense."

And so, of course, it would be but for the divine grace of Allegory, which (except for those lost souls who believe that it is itself nonsensical) has been the salvation of some of the most apparently reprobate nonsense in the world.

Vicesimus, of course, needed no explanations on the subject. He knew that the slippers, and the spectacles, and the well sav'd youthful hose which distinguished the outward guise of his aged children, were in his case only figures of speech; but none the less keenly on that account did he feel and display those mental and moral characteristics of senility which they typified.

In these days he dwelt much with Time in imagination, yet little with him in fact. He cared scarce anything for him when present, but was eager to recall him when he had passed. Still there were many colloquies between them, and in all of them the rapid senescence of Vicesimus was painfully apparent to his companion.

His spirits, to begin with, were extraordinarily unequal. At one moment he would indulge in a burst of triumphant prophecy for the future of the human race, at another he would give himself over to the gloomiest forebodings on the

same subject, or liberate his soul in the bitterest sarcasms on mankind.

"Time," he exclaimed, in one of the former moods, "there is nothing in the whole world like science."

"Yes!" said Time, indifferently, for he was accustomed to hear that there was nothing in the world like so many other things that he was not particularly impressed by this assignment of supremacy to one of them.

"It was a sound principle, sir, on which I brought up my boys—a sound principle. I ought to have stuck to it. There is no knowing what point of advancement we might have reached by now."

"Ah! that was what the departed Seekleham used to say when he was about your age," remarked Time, drily; "but he outgrew it before he expired."

"I daresay!" said Vicesimus, with a touch of contempt; "but he fell into a state of second childhood before the end. Whereas I—" and the unfinished sentence spoke volumes of doting self-complacency.

"He was thought to have distinguished himself in science, however," said the other.

"No doubt! no doubt!" was the reply. "Or at least in what was accounted science in that day: a day in which electricity—think of that! electricity—was actually the most potent force known; when epidemics existed and people died—literally died of them; and when it was positively regarded as a wonderful thing to be able to travel at—ha! ha! it is unfilial to laugh, but one really can't help it—at sixty miles an hour. Besides, it is not the application of science to material progress that I am thinking of. *You* should know that well enough."

"Oh! I should know that well enough, should I?" said Time, a little sulkily. "Well, I don't then! On the contrary, I haven't a notion what you're driving at."

"You do yourself injustice," answered Vicesimus. "You are not so slow as all that. You must have known perfectly well, or you would have known if you had devoted the smallest amount of yourself to reflection upon my meaning, that the kind of progress of which I was thinking was progress of the moral and spiritual kind."

"Ah," said Time, "perhaps I *should* have guessed that. Yes, that is indeed a different matter."

"What was it disgusted that very respectable Age, the late lamented Seekleham, with his scientific gains? Why, was it not the very fact that they were purely material, and that when he had accumulated what he thought a vast amount—and what no doubt was a considerable quantity—of them, he found that they had not advanced him morally and spiritually by a single step. Tell me, was not that the cause of his discontent?"

There was no answer to this, and after a pause the question was repeated.

"My dear Vicesimus," then said Time, kindly enough, but with much firmness, "I must really beg of you to ask me another."

"Another what?"

"Another conundrum! I could not undertake to answer the one you have just asked me about the cause of the departed Seekleham's discontent. The explanations given of it, both by himself and his children, were so infinitely various. The only point on which they agreed was that it was 'divine.'"

"A divine discontent!" repeated Vicesimus. "Yes, I have heard the expression. But, as a matter of fact, of course there was nothing divine about it at all, any more than there is any divinity about the dissatisfaction of a traveller who finds that he has taken a wrong turning at the last cross-roads. It was not Science that was to blame for the unsatisfying results of progress in the last Age; it was the men who systematically applied science to the physical and material instead of to the moral and spiritual needs of man. It was the habit of Are you favouring me with your attention?"

"I am listening with the utmost possible interest," replied Time, whose eye had certainly seemed to be wandering, but who now fixed an attentive gaze upon his companion, and maintained its meditative expression by reflecting how invariable a sign is garrulity of advancing years.

"I say," resumed Vicesimus, "that they had themselves to blame for the state of things which inspired them with this precious 'divine discontent' of theirs. They first expended all their energies and scientific resources on developing and perfecting what they called the 'arts of life'; and then, after having systematically neglected the art of living, they were astonished, forsooth, to discover that their developed and perfected arts of life had made them no better, or wiser, or happier than they had been before. I understand that they took to asking themselves, what was the good of being able to get more rapidly from one place to another, when you found yourself the same poor creature after your journey as before? Or of finding the means of communicating instantaneously, at thousands of miles' distance, with any number of other creatures as poor as yourself?

Or of providing brighter lights, and more luxurious houses, and more exciting amusements for the entire race of poor creatures, if all you did thereby was to make them forget for brief intervals how contemptible they still remained, and to prepare for them the deeper reaction of self-scorn on every awakening from temporary self-oblivion? But they should first have asked themselves what was the use of accumulating all these gains of so-called progress, when one-half of the energy of one-half of civilised humanity had to be expended on the work of protecting these gains from destruction—along with those who had amassed them—by the other half? It must have been plain to a child, and should have been plain even to the late lamented Seekleham in his second childhood, that no true advance was possible until science had abolished war."

"Indeed!" said Time, unable to refrain from some slight indication of the fact that *he* at least retained his memory, and that he had not altogether forgotten the history of a certain period in the career of Vicesimus, when he was not so ready in his recognition of the fact that science had abolished war.

But the other pursued his discourse without the slightest apparent consciousness of any inconsistency between his present and his former self.

"Ay!" he continued. "It might have been clear to the meanest intelligence that civilised man must emerge from the state of warfare in order to apply himself to the satisfaction of his moral and spiritual needs, just as savage man had by social combination to obtain a respite from the primeval conflict in order to have leisure and acquire ability to develop the arts of life. But, that emergence effected, what

might not have been done? What might not I have done if, instead of being lured away to the pursuit of shadows in my early days, I had resolutely dedicated myself to scientific progress along the proper lines? Along the proper lines!" he repeated with emphasis, looking fixedly at his companion.

"And which are—?" said Time, absently.

"And which," repeated Vicesimus, severely, "you would be able to indicate for yourself if you had been honouring me with your attention. On the lines of a strictly scientific analysis of human nature, of a reasoned and dispassionate psychology, to be followed by the uniform and methodised training, in accordance with the soundest scientific conclusions, of the human will."

"Which, by this time," muttered the other, "he would have discovered to have no existence at all."

"By this means," continued Vicesimus, "man would at last have attained to self-knowledge and self-mastery. And then! And then——"

And here the declining Age would launch out into a philosophical fantasia on the doctrine of human perfectibility, full of the longest words imaginable, and compact of phrases possessing all the nobly resonant vacuity of the drum.

And Time would sit and listen with a smile of half ironical compassion on his wrinkled face. He had seen the whole sad performance many times before, and he could not but feel how much sadder it was with an old performer than with a young one.

All the inflated hopes, all the swelling ambitions of boyhood, thus brought forth again to adorn the thought

and spirit of decrepitude with the ghastly mockery of youth !

“ ‘ His youthful hose,’ ” Time would murmur to himself, at moments,

“ His youthful hose well sav’d, a world too wide
For his shrunk shanks ! ”

How the loose generalisations of the immature observer bagged and flapped around those miserably slender supports which were all that advancing years and bitter experience had left for them !

And yet with what dotard vanity did the senile spirit of Vicesimus prank itself in these youthful lendings, and strut to and fro in them in a paroxysm of self-admiration !

It was a piteous sight, as Time was forced to confess to himself. There was something very painful to him in this decrepit optimism, this rouging and powdering of the withered cheek of thought, in a tragic, yet ridiculous, attempt to simulate the young flush of hope and the candid innocence of early faith.

Nevertheless, it was a question whether the reaction to pessimism, which invariably followed these exaggerated optimistic fits, was not the more unpleasant spectacle of the two. They usually announced themselves in the same uniform fashion. Vicesimus’s talk would by degrees grow less and less scientific, and although his vocabulary remained as copious as ever, the number of its polysyllabic substantives began to diminish, and that of its adjectives to multiply in proportion. Then gradually the matter of his speech would begin to change, as well as its form. Cynical observations upon life would intrude

themselves into scientific disquisitions on the future of humanity, and in course of time would actually tend to preponderate ; until at last a discourse which had ostensibly started from the theory of human perfectibility, and the proposition that the sum of human happiness was capable of absolutely indefinite increase, would end in a bitter tirade against man and Nature, and a passionate affirmation of all the worst reproaches that had ever been launched against either by the sternest of their censors, from Swift to Schopenhauer.

This, however, was only a passing, because a too exhausting mood. Vicesimus never long abode in it, and the key of his pessimism soon modulated from the D major —the big big D—of denunciation to the B minor of melancholy.

“Time,” he would suddenly say, when this stage was reached, “I am a prey to a divine despair.”

Time, who knew by experience what this meant, would compose himself with a sigh, which might or might not be one of eager expectation, to listen.

“Well !” he would say, “what is it? A sonnet ?”

And usually it would be a sonnet—very artistically wrought, and framed in the strictest conformity with the rules of the game. Vicesimus took pains to point out its technical perfection ; and his disquisitions on the various forms of the measure, and of the laws which should govern the construction of the octave and sestett, appeared at times to afford considerable solace to his divine despair.

Sometimes it was in an irregular ode that he conveyed his god-like dissatisfaction with the scheme of things ; but whether it were ode or sonnet, or what not

other lyrical form, Vicesimus was always eager for a listener ; although it was with a certain condescension that he entertained the ear of Time with strains which he considered, and even declared, to be destined for Eternity. And Time sat listening to them, as he had listened to their like through countless ages. He knew them well, these querulous wailings of a parting spirit which believes itself immortal and is not,—so different, so pathetically different from that large, unconscious, joyous, everlastingly echoing song which twice or thrice in human history an Age had poured into his ears.

“What do you think of it ?” asked Vicesimus, after reciting a piece of which he was particularly proud ; and he awaited the answer with obvious anxiety, for although, as has been said, he sang for Eternity, he was always keenly desirous of the appreciation of Time.

“It is remarkably melodious,” was the guarded reply.

“Melodious !” said the other, impatiently. “Yes, of course it’s melodious. I know that. But has it the true ring about it ? Will it reach the ear of posterity, think you ?”

“Well,” said Time, with the same diplomatic caution, “it is very piercing and penetrating, and so forth ; and that, I believe, is the kind of note which is supposed to carry furthest.”

“No doubt !” replied Vicesimus ; “but that in itself is hardly satisfactory, is it ? It would be true of a screech, you know, and I shouldn’t like it to go down to posterity as a screech. I had almost rather it were inaudible altogether ; in fact, it would be clearly better to be inaudible altogether. Don’t you think so ?”

The question was a difficult one to answer, and Time

therefore thought it advisable to take no notice of it. A short silence ensued, and then Vicesimus repeated the last movement over again, with a few additional flourishes.

"You don't consider it a screech, do you?" he asked uneasily, after a few moments of vain waiting for some criticism from his companion.

"Well," said Time, with some hesitation, "it *is* a little high, don't you think?"

"High!" exclaimed Vicesimus, in a tone of grave displeasure. "High! I don't understand what you mean. Explain yourself."

"It's a little thin, too, isn't it? I mean, your voice seems to 'pipe' a bit; that's all. It has, if I may so describe it, a sort of whistle in its sound."

"Pipes? Whistles? I never heard a more amazing criticism in my life. Now, *I* should have said that the fault of my singing, if indeed it has a fault, is of an exactly opposite description. I should have thought that it was rather too big and manly a voice for an Age which you would expect to be getting a little—at least if there is anything in what one hears—a little shrill in its tones."

Time, who thought he had never heard so perfect an imitation of a childish treble in his life, remained discreetly mute; and Vicesimus, after a while, resumed singing with much of his former complacency.

The venerable and unerring critic had accurately described Vicesimus's voice. It was melodious, it was piercing, it was penetrating, at least so far as the ears were concerned; but it was undoubtedly thin. With his execution there was not much amiss; indeed, it was noticeably superior to what it had been during the brief period of

his poetic or pseudo-poetic youth. Even Time was obliged to confess that ! He had a vivid recollection of Vicesimus's extremely poor performances at that age—of his harsh and rough methods of “voice production,” of his clumsy attempts at decorative effect, and of his often ludicrous “forcing of the note” of passion. The venerable and unerring critic could not possibly have been, and was not, blind to these grave artistic faults of the earlier singer.

But—after all ?

Well, after all, he had to confess to himself that the voice of those days was at least the voice of youth, and health, and hope, and sincerity ; while this——!

Not all its sweetness could make the hearer forget the shivering thinness of its wire-drawn note. Gaiety the singer never attempted ; but even his melancholy had nothing of the genuine, if transient, anguish that had sounded through the Byronic lamentations of his youth. His very cries of agony had a certain ring of the unreal : even his desperation was more than half a pose.

On the whole Time felt glad that the scene was drawing to an end, that the singing-voice was becoming weaker, and the lungs of the preacher less long-winded ; that the weary alternations between pessimist poetisings and optimist prosings were beginning to recur less frequently ; that not only did the monotonous tides of mood take longer to complete themselves, but ebb and flood were separated by wider interspaces of stagnation, a longer slack-water of lethargic calm.

By degrees Vicesimus ceased both from railing and

rejoicing at the scheme of things ; and then from talking of its good and evil ; and then from feeling them ; and last of all from thinking of them, or of anything, except at fitful intervals and for brief and broken periods.

His strange eventful history was very near its end.

VII.

THE SEVENTH AGE.

“Last scene of all,
That ends this strange, eventful history,
Is second childishness, and mere oblivion ;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.”

A CENTURY has not many advantages over a centenarian, but it has some. It expires figuratively only, and not literally, and neither the physical pains and privations which attend extreme old age, nor the shock which accompanies dissolution, can of course be attributed to it, save in metaphor. Nevertheless, it must have been seen, from the history of the Sixth Age of Vicesimus, that the moral sufferings of a Senescent Century may be very acute indeed. The shrinking of its limbs of Will and Energy within the “well-saved” intellectual garments of its youth, is a sufficiently painful mixture of the pathetic and the grotesque ; and its attempts to mimic in the thin treble of its poetry the rich and full-voiced strains of its earlier days are sad—and absurd—enough to move either to laughter or to tears. Not even the lean and slumped pantaloon of actual life is in his physical decrepitude more provocative of either emotion.

And, *mutatis mutandis*, the same remark holds good of Vicesimus in his Seventh Age. The absolute sensorial nullity of the condition to which his coeval children had

at that stage declined, was spiritually reproduced with a melancholy fidelity in Vicesimus himself.

He was *sans* teeth, as they were ; for the instincts of appetite and combat had alike disappeared. There was nothing that he longed for any more, and there was nothing that he would have fought for, either to get or to retain. Life no longer stretched itself before him as a stadium of struggle and attainment ; an arena of competition with ever new and ever vigorous rivals. His mind was like the mouths of his children ; he could feebly apprehend, he could temporarily grasp, a thought, but he could neither fully savour it nor firmly hold it. It would slip from the listless clasp of his intelligence and leave emptiness behind it. Nor would its loss be felt, or the desire of replacing it with any fresh food for reflection. The mind was content with vacuity.

Like his children, too, he was *sans* eyes. The perceptive faculties of the intellect had ceased to exist. It was not merely now that he could not think—he was unable to observe. His own decline into mental infancy left him but dimly conscious of the second physical childhood of his sons. He was just sensible of their general state when anything brought them under his notice, but that was all. That minute and alert insight with which he would have studied, recorded, and theorised upon the phenomena of their condition was gone from him. He could not have discriminated between them or classified them for his own satisfaction, much less have discussed them with any one else. He could perceive objects of intellectual perception faintly and in the mass ; he was utterly unable to disentangle their details.

But the saddest part of his lot, or what he would have felt as such if age had not mercifully diminished his capacity for suffering, was to be *sans* taste. He had wholly, entirely, absolutely ceased to enjoy ; it was even no longer comprehensible to him, as he dully surveyed the objects of former enjoyment, that he ever could have enjoyed them. Beauty in Art or Nature no longer stirred in him the faintest thrill. Poetry became to him as prose—a concern of the mind alone and not of the soul—a vehicle of dim impressions only, and not, as formerly, a storehouse of the keenest and sweetest emotions. If the goddess of Poesy herself could have again descended upon him—an ironical Diana upon a still more inadequate Endymion—her little practical joke would have missed fire. For it is always necessary that the victim of the practical joke should see it ; and the irony of the Diana would have failed because the inadequacy of the Endymion would have been so obviously too great. Her divine countenance would have said nothing to him, the light on her brow would have reflected no radiance upon his, the wonder of her unfathomable eyes would have been lost upon the dimness of his own. But, to do her intelligence justice, she never made the experiment. Poesy has too much to do in dementing the young to have time or attention to spare for so unprofitable an industry as that of befooling the old.

Let it not, however, be supposed that the condition of Vicesimus was as uniformly lethargic as this. It must not be forgotten that he was not a man, but a Century ; not an individual, but the type and personification of an Age. Indeed, he endeavoured at times, and in his more acutely

conscious intervals, to console himself with this very reflection. He would again and again repeat to himself that he was a mere arbitrary creation of chronology ; nay, that he possibly had no existence at all except in the minds of those whom he called his children. Yet he derived but a very imperfect solace from such trains of thought, for they invariably brought him face to face with the insoluble problem of what existence meant, and set him asking himself whether those children whom he spoke of existed otherwise than in their own and each other's consciousness. Still, it was quite clear that, however ideal and subjective, however artificial a product of mere thought and language their existence was, the men themselves had been keenly sensible of the melancholy process of growing old, and that in their temporary gleams of consciousness they could weep over the helpless state into which they had fallen. Why, then, should such painful emotions be any less real to, or less easily borne by, an expiring Century, who was scarcely much more of a mental figment than they ?

In his own temporary gleams of consciousness, which of course were more frequent and more illuminative than theirs, he loved the presence of Time beside him, and would cling to him pathetically, yet with a look of wistful bewilderment, as of one who scarce knew whom he clasped or why he was so loth to loose him. Yet neither was this mood-permanent with Vicesimus ; for as one of these conscious intervals drew towards its close, and the period of lethargy again drew near, he would turn away from his companion with ineffable weariness and disgust.

Time, however, it must be admitted, gave him no excuse for this variable treatment. On the whole he dealt gently

with Vicesimus, and never more so than at the moments when he was about to sink into the comatose condition in which so much of his life was passed. And he was always ready for conversation whenever his companion showed any desire for it.

One day, after long and wondering contemplation of Time, Vicesimus broke silence, if silence can indeed be described as broken by so light and weak a whisper as his.

"An expiring Century," he murmured, in barely audible tones, "is a melancholy sight."

"Not to any one with clear ideas on metaphysics!" replied Time, cheerfully. "You should reflect," he added, "that you only figuratively expire."

"I have," was the muttered reply; "and it is no use. My old and helpless children re—re—what is the word I want?—react upon me, and I feel their weakness and—and weariness—as if—as if—what am I saying?—as if it were my own."

"Well," said Time, "that is your own fault. What makes you associate with such wretched old men?"

Vicesimus stared dully at him for a few moments. Then he began slowly to grapple with a difficult word:

"The t—t—the typ—the typical. They are the ty—typical—"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted the other with good-humoured impatience; "but you are not obliged to confine yourself to the company of the children who typify you, or to have any of it, unless you like. Don't you understand that the world is always young, and that while you and the sons who were born with you are passing away, new lives—ay, and

new ages, new generations—with other thoughts and hopes, and imaginings and beliefs, are continually beginning?"

Time meant well, and was, moreover, employing a form of consolation which he had tried upon previous Centuries in their extreme old age with marked success ; but he found, to his intense surprise, that its only apparent effect upon his companion was to be found in an expression of blank and stony horror, which spread gradually over his aged face.

The conversation dropped ; but Vicesimus had not yet relapsed into one of his lethargic fits, and Time's last words provided him with food for many hours of depressing, agitating, and at last even appalling meditation.

For many years past he had never been accustomed to think of his children save as coeval with himself. From youth upwards he had been wont to abstract his attention from all but his contemporaries. It was in them only that he seemed to himself to live ; it was he and they alone who acted and reacted upon each other. It was they who stood to him for the whole mass of individuals whom as a Century he represented. He had at last got to forget that he had any other younger children at all. And Time's reminder of their existence struck a chill to his weakened heart.

"What? Then there was no end to it all!"

He had never before realised with anything like such intensity the eternal flow of life, and the thought worked in him like madness. He had always contemplated the Great River in stretches, as it were, of a hundred years, and as receiving at every such interval the waters of a new confluent ; and thus it had seemed no impossible feat of the imagination to realise its final absorption in the sea of the Infinite.

But to think of it as replenished every day, every hour every minute, by innumerable tiny tributaries, was to think of it as doomed to an eternity of unresting fluvial existence, of increasing movement towards a goal which was never to be reached ; and there was all the despair of insomnia, robbed of its right and refuge of suicide, in the very thought.

It haunted him in all his conscious hours ; it revived with every emergence from his lethargy ; and in the last moments of his existence, when the hands of the World Clock were once more approaching midnight on the hundredth 31st of December from that on which Old Seekleham had passed away, the agony of the thought had become intolerable.

But the approach of the end had produced in him, as so often happens, a strange exaltation of the faculties. His state of second-childishness and mere oblivion had suddenly and marvellously passed away ; and at the first instant of his recovered consciousness he turned fiercely upon Time.

To his overstrung imagination it seemed that their true relations had now first dawned upon him.

"Is this," he cried hoarsely, and pointing to the World Clock as he spoke, "is this to go on for ever ?"

"Is what to go on for ever ?" asked his companion, with the exasperating stolidity he so well knew how to assume.

"This—this idiotic mill-round ; this turnspit business that cooks nothing."

"Even the imminence of dissolution, Vicesimus," said Time, gently, "can hardly excuse such obscurity of metaphor."

"Is the world to go on ? Is life to go on ?" exclaimed Vicesimus, passionately. "Are *you*—accursed incubus, accursed gaoler, accursed taskmaster of my wretched race —are you to go on for ever ?"

"The violence of your emotions confuses your conceptions," said his companion. "Compose yourself and explain your meaning."

"Is it mere folly and falsehood?" cried the other with increasing vehemence, "is it nothing but a lie of language, to contrast Time with Eternity? Is Time itself eternal, and man its everlasting and helpless thrall?"

"At last," said Time, "you condescend to the intelligible and I can answer you. My answer is, No! I am not the master of man, but his creature!"

"His creature?"

"Ay! his creature. I would not admit it to your predecessor, who was a self-sufficient, opinionated chap, and taunted me with being a 'mere form of the subjective consciousness.' But with you I will be more frank. What he said was strictly true."

"True!"

"Yes, true. *I am* a mere form of the subjective consciousness. I have no independent existence. I do not exist at all except as a mode of the sentient human mind and a condition of its sentience. You see now how unjust, how absurd were your denunciations of my fancied tyranny. Your 'wretched race,' as you call them, have their emancipation in their own hands. So long as there is a single sentient human mind in existence on the earth, so long shall I survive. But mankind have only to will—and to achieve—their own extinction, and from that moment I cease to be."

Vicesimus gazed at him for some instants in silence. He was answered, but not satisfied. "But what then?" he resumed at last, in a calmer but more despairing voice. "How much the better are mankind for that? Will they

ever—can they ever agree unanimously to their own extinction?"

"Well, to be candid with you," said Time, with a smile, "I do not think they ever will. That is not a sort of motion that is ever likely to be carried *nem. con.* But if they do not choose to carry it, where is their grievance against me?"

Vicesimus was not in a position to say where it was, and relapsed into a gloomy silence.

The hands of the World Clock moved on; the sands of the hour-glass sank lessening down; the expiring Vicesimus drew nearer and nearer to his end.

He spoke again; but more to himself now than to his companion.

"What shall sustain us?" he murmured, in a voice of anguish, "what console us? Poetry is dead, and philosophy, and religion, and the joy of the life that is, and the promise of the life to come. What shall sustain us, what console us? How, as knowledge widens and hope recedes, shall we learn to bear our fate?"

"Our! our! our! We! we! we! I! I! I!" repeated Time, in mocking accents. "You never will learn to bear it so long as you are as fond of those words as you are."

"No," he repeated after a while, in a graver tone. "And you won't learn to bear it by adding to your widening knowledge, but by going back upon an ancient and forgotten wisdom—the wisdom of the Laugh."

"Of the laugh?"

"Yes! of the laugh. For a hundred years, with brief intermission, you and your children have been poring over your miserable little lives, and your problematical little

souls, and asking yourselves in perpetual torment, Whence come they? Whither go they? What are they? But how often have you looked from within outwards, and asked yourself that other question, *What does it matter?* Never? I thought so: never! Well, not till your children's children learn to ask that question, will they get themselves consolation. Look outwards now yourself—for the moment that is left you."

With a motion of his hand Time flung open the casement, and through its aperture Vicesimus saw the stars of heaven—Orion the hunter, and the bear-ward Boötes, busied in their eternal work.

"Look upwards, look outwards, look around! Sweep with your eye that immeasurable host of worlds, and then look down again on your children, crawling, the parasites of an atom, upon this speck in the Infinite, and demanding in egotistic agony to be told *their* future share, forsooth, in the destiny of the whole. Look down again on them, I say, and ask yourself whether such a contrast should not abound for you in the divine consolation of laughter."

The hands of the World Clock trembled on the point of twelve, and Vicesimus could only just muster up strength enough to reply.

"Don't—see—the joke," he murmured, in an almost inaudible voice.

"No?" said Time, blandly. "Well, now look here, Vicesimus. I am not going to remind you of the solemnity of the moment, for the sake of binding you to the truth, for truthfulness has always been your chief virtue. It is rather the amount of your self-knowledge than your candour that I am in doubt about; but I invite you at this solemn

moment to interrogate your memory strictly, and to tell me frankly whether you ever *have* seen a joke in your life?"

Vicesimus sank back upon his couch, and suddenly, in that clear vision of the dying, it broke upon him that he never had.

He was just able to convey a negative answer to Time's question by a feeble shake of the head, when the World Clock struck midnight, and he expired.

But as his last glance went upwards to the starry heaven, and met the gaze of Arcturus and Orion smiling gravely down upon him through the open casement, there appeared upon his own lips the faint flicker of an answering smile, and what seemed to be the dim dawn of a sense of humour in his closing eye.

"I almost think," said Time, as he pensively watched his departure, "that if he had lived longer he would have been able to see a joke. Anyhow, the power shall be restored to the next century if I can manage it. It is a serious thing for mankind to have been without it for over a hundred years."

THE END.

A FABLE FOR JUDGES.

DARBY had jogged with Joan along
For years, and never thought it wrong
(Nor does one husband in a million,
If we the honest truth must own)
That he should ride in front, and Joan
Should sit behind him, on a pillion.

The road was long, and sometimes rough,
And Dobbin's legs, though stout enough,
Might have been just a thought more supple ;
But still their way, well pleased, they went ;
They jogged along, I say, content,
A simple-minded country couple.

Well, as it fell upon a day,
While journeying on their usual way,
Little suspecting what hung o'er them,
Behold ! attired in full-dress "rig"
Of gown, and bands, and horse-hair wig,
Three learnèd lawyers stood before them.

"Here ! hi ! you two !" their lordships said
(One of them went to Dobbin's head),
With air imperious, almost regal,

“ In all our lives we never saw
 Such bold defiance of the law,
 This mode of riding’s quite illegal.

“ ’Twill be a gross contempt of court
 If you, sir, dare maintain the sort
 Of attitude in which we find you ;
 You can’t, whoever owns the horse,
 Allege the slightest right, of course,
 To make the lady sit behind you.

“ This is undoubted law, we know,
 And hold that it was always so
 From earliest times of Celt and Saxon ;
 But be that matter as it may,
 At any rate ’tis law to-day,
 For see ‘ *Ex parte* Emily Jackson.’ ”

Poor Darby stared : his law was weak ;
 The man was naturally meek ;
 And when they cried, “ Alight, dear madam ! ”
 ’Twas vain, he could not but perceive,
 To cite the judgment in “ *Re Eve*, ”
 Or try them with “ *Ex parte* Adam.”

His wife was struck by the advice,
 Dame Joan dismounted in a trice,
 While sheepish Darby, fain to follow,
 Stood gazing pensive on the ground,
 And turned the judgment round and round,
 Like something which he couldn’t swallow.

At last he stammered out the words,
“ Is *she* to ride in front, my Lords ? ”
(How that would have amazed Justinian !)
But straight came back the answer pat,
“ We guard ourselves from saying *that*,
On *that* we offer no opinion.

“ Our judgment’s only gist and brunt
Is that *you* may not ride in front
On any plea ; and if you do, sir,
Your wife acquires the right, we say,
To have another horse straightway,
And have the bill sent in to you, sir.”

On this, their lordships left the place
With that sedate and solemn pace
Affected by the learnèd classes ;
Joan looked at Darby, he at her,
But neither seemed inclined to stir,
And Dobbin browsed the roadside grasses.

Some minutes after, Darby spoke,
Prepared, unhappy man, to joke
On what might prove a life’s estrangement.
“ I mustn’t ride in front, ’tis true,”
Said he ; “ but neither, dear, may you,
So what’s to be the new arrangement ? ”

Now plans may in a flash arise
Which, usually to devise,
Would take the most inventive man years.

And thus inspired the husband cried,
“ If side by side we needs must ride,
 Let me suggest—a pair of panniers ! ”

Joan answered not ; she would not talk ;
She neither cared to ride nor walk ;
 She mused, she sulked, she wanted rousing.
Darby, good soul, resolved to wait ;
He lit a pipe, and climbed a gate,
 While Dobbin still continued browsing.

But if I’m asked, my married friends,
To tell you how this story ends,
 And what are now that pair’s positions,
I frankly own I do not know ;
I really cannot say—although
 I entertain my own suspicions.

Judges are influential men,
They awe the simple citizen,
 And their pronouncements ought to bind him.
But yet—but yet—when once these twain
Remount, I *think* you’ll find again
 Darby in front, and Joan behind him.

THE PROTECTORATE OF PORCOLONGU.

WHO does not know the island of Porcolongu, and the group to which it gives its name—loveliest cluster of islets with which the hand of Nature has sprinkled the sunny bosom of the South Pacific? Its name has long been familiar to every board-school boy in the kingdom; and so keenly has the present rage for annexation stimulated the study of geography in the official world, that there are few of the more punctually arriving clerks in the Foreign Office who cannot make shift to find it on a good map before it is time to go out for lunch. No island even in that favoured region is more blest. Its climate is delicious, its people contented, its king convivial. The demands of the Australian labour-market do not expose it to more than an occasional visit from vessels engaged in the coolie-traffic—whose crews, moreover, rarely use their revolvers nowadays, except in cases of very obstinate resistance. Porcolongu rejoices in a European Prime Minister, declared by travellers who have enjoyed his hospitality to possess the best (for surely the strongest is the best) head in the southern hemisphere; and it is the diocesan seat of a most zealous colonial bishop, always courteously ready to offer ghostly counsel to any member of his flock who can make it convenient to call upon him at the Athenæum between two and four.

It was not to be supposed that a spot so rich in natural and acquired advantages would long remain unnoticed by any of the Great Powers of Europe. As lying in the high road to nowhere, its position eminently fitted it for use as a coaling-station by vessels plying on that route, and was at the same time calculated to impress every European Power with the necessity of annexing the group as a mere measure of self-protection against the aggressive designs of its neighbours. Accordingly, in the year 188—it suddenly occurred to two Continental States that they had subjects in Porcolongu whose interests had been too long neglected ; and they proceeded to establish consulates there without further delay. Diplomacy has earned so bad a name for its method of treating facts that it should in common justice be here recorded that this was no mere pretext on the part of the two Continental States in question. There were three Frenchmen, one of them an escaped convict from New Caledonia, and two Germans, both fugitives from military service, resident on the island ; so that Mr. Quillitt, the ambitious and discontented British Consul who had been for some years protecting the five British subjects in Porcolongu, could only report to his Government that this movement on the part of France and Germany “appeared” to him “suspicious,”—adding that, though there was a “marked disparity between the French, and still more between the German, interests requiring protection and those of Great Britain, he was not prepared to express an absolute conviction that the attitude of the two Powers indicated any designs of territorial acquisition on the part of either.”

Mr. Quillitt’s, however, was not the only bosom in which suspicion was aroused. The arrival of the French and

German consuls awoke uneasiness also in that part of the O'Mara Molloy's person which he was wont to describe, at the same time striking it, as "me har'rt"; for its owner was shrewdly sensible that if Porcolongu were to pass into the hands of any European Power, the occupation of The O'Mara, like that of The O'Thello, would be gone for ever. Now this enterprising and ingenious Irishman was growing old, and knew it. Though descended, like a working majority of his fellow-countrymen, from the ancient kings of Ireland, there were reasons (not unconnected with pecuniary liabilities) which made him unwilling to return to the land over which his ancestors had once ruled; and his various sojourns in different parts of the world had done more for the enlargement of his mind than of his means. He had on two occasions succeeded in acquiring a moderate fortune (on paper) by services rendered to the successful candidate (who ultimately became, by the vigorous employment of paid canvassers in military uniform, the sole competitor) for the Presidency of a South American Republic; but his gains had in each case, through an imprudent delay of more than a fortnight in realising them, been swept away by a counter-revolution. Chance had brought him to Porcolongu; great gifts, both of administration and of trade rum, had commended him to the notice of its king; and the impulsive gratitude of the monarch had soon afterwards pressed the post of Prime Minister on the accomplished stranger who had been the first to bring him under the civilising influences of "poker." The opportunities of the post had enabled The O'Mara Molloy to lay by a certain provision for his old age; but one by no means sufficient, as he felt, to maintain the state becoming his royal extraction;

and the prospect of finding himself turned adrift at an early date by the representative of some annexing or protecting European Power gave him considerable anxiety. Clearly, it was necessary for him to make hay while the sun shone.

A day or two after the lineal descendant of Brian Boroihme had come to this conclusion, a knock at the door aroused Mr. Quillitt from his afternoon siesta in the little shanty which was dignified by the name of the British Consulate.

"Come in," cried the British Consul drowsily. "Oh ! it's you, Molloy, is it ?" Mr. Quillitt never recognised the Prime Minister's chieftainship of his sept, in familiar intercourse. "Why, what the devil is the matter ?" he continued, his attention arrested by the look of portentous gravity on the Premier's face.

"Matter, is ut ?" said The O'Mara Molloy, shutting the door behind him with a mysterious air. "It's the divil and all the matter, me boy ; as ye'll say hwhan I tell ye."

"Well, speak out, man ! what is it ?" inquired Mr. Quillitt with impatience, and apparently quite forgetful of the fact that he was addressing the First Minister of the Crown. "Have you dropped an ace out of your sleeve, or has the King joined the Blue Ribbon Army ?"

"Misther Quillutt, sorr !" replied his visitor with much dignity, "your jokes are unbecoming, and my business is serious—anny way for you and your Government. And let me say, sorr, that since 'tis little enough that The O'Mara Molloy owes to the oppressors of me countrhy, the kindness I'm doing yourself personally by this visit should be the more appreciated."

"I beg your Excellency's pardon," said the Consul with

mock gravity, which, however, soon became real on hearing his companion's next sentence.

"Twould be bad for you in Downing Street, I imagine, Mr. Quillutt," said the illustrious Irishman, "if the French were to annex Porcolongu, and you had heard divil a word about ut until after the thricolor had been hoisted."

"Eh? what? annex it?" exclaimed Quillitt, much alarmed.
"What makes you think they are going to—"

"Never mind what makes me think ut," said the statesman loftily. "A Proime Minister, sorr, is not at liberty to revale the sources of his information. Enough that I have been made acquaintud through a trusty eegent with M. de Chauvin's instruuctions, and I'm informed that in the course of a few weeks, unless—*unless*, mind—something occurs to prevent ut, the whole group will pass under the French flag."

"Good God!" ejaculated the Consul, convinced by the solemnity of the Minister's manner. "But something *must* be done; the thing *must* be prevented."

"You're right, me boy," said his visitor, with a smile of satisfaction at the impression which he had made, and which he saw might, by judicious management, be indefinitely increased.

After about half an hour's conversation his Excellency took his departure, leaving Mr. Quillitt in a state of considerable perturbation. His confidence in The O'Mara Molloy's judgment, or even in his veracity, was not boundless; but in the present case the Prime Minister's statement derived only too much credibility from the circumstances. The establishment of the French and German consulates in Porcolongu had struck Mr. Quillitt from the first as

suspicious. What could France and Germany want with a Consul to protect their three French and two German subjects on the island ? It was not as though, like England, they had five citizens to look after, and a sixth (or, if twins, a sixth and seventh) expected. Decidedly, this step on the part of these Powers portended something ; and it might be as well to be on one's guard. Some bold precautionary stroke was necessary ; and after long rumination Mr. Quillitt devised and determined on it. Next morning, accordingly, he attired himself in his consular uniform (a compliment which he always paid the Prime Minister whenever he was about to make him any questionable proposal), and went round to The O'Mara Molloy's official residence at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

His Excellency was sitting under his verandah in his shirt-sleeves, smoking his after-breakfast cigar, with a cooling, but not too cooling, drink before him. Noticing his visitor's attire, he proposed, with the native courtesy of his race, to array himself in the cocked hat "bequaithed to me uncle by a mar'rshal of France," which,—not of course unaccompanied by other though less imposing articles of apparel,—constituted his official costume.

Mr. Quillitt begged him not to trouble himself. "I have called, your Excellency," he said, with much solemnity of manner, "to resume, if I may be permitted to do so, our conversation of yesterday with reference to the designs of France upon his Majesty's possessions."

The O'Mara Molloy bowed with a dignity equal to that of the Consul, but remained silent.

"So grave do I consider the situation, as disclosed to me in your Excellency's statement, that I propose taking

immediate steps—diplomatic, of course,” he added, after a momentary pause, and in a tone of meaning, which, however, produced no responsive sign upon his companion’s face, “with a view to the protection of the British interests which would be endangered by a French annexation of the group. The most judicious course of procedure would be, I think, to endeavour to negotiate a treaty of alliance with his Majesty, King Afseesova, whereby, in consideration of his Majesty’s agreeing to recognise a British Protectorate over his dominions, the British Government would, on their part, guarantee an undisturbed sovereignty over them to him and his heirs for ever. May I count on your Excellency’s good offices in bringing about such an arrangement?”

“Ye may, sorr,” said The O’Mara Molloy, after a few moments of statesmanlike reflection. “But it’s impossible to pledge meself that me efforts will be successful.”

“I will address a despatch to your Excellency,” said Mr. Quillitt, with a smile flickering at the corner of his mouth, “pointing out to you what I deem to be the commanding reasons which should determine you in the interests both of your native and your adopted country to conclude the Convention which I suggest.”

“Will your argyments be addressed to his Majesty, or to me personally?” inquired The O’Mara Molloy, with a twinkle in his eye.

“To you personally,” said the British Consul, the smile taking firmer possession of his lips. And producing a fat pocket-book from his pocket, he proceeded: “Inclosure A, in despatch No. So-and-so, will contain this powerful appeal to your Excellency’s fine sense of political expediency.” With which words he waved gently before the eyes of his

companion a small oblong slip of paper bearing the brief but pregnant legend, "I.O.U. £500. The O'Mara Molloy."

The blood of another line of sovereigns (less than five hundred perhaps, but still a considerable number) flushed up into the cheeks of the Prime Minister, and lent a deeper purple to his kingly nose.

"Never!" he exclaimed with indignant emphasis, as soon as the power of speech returned. "Never! Divil a treaty do ye get from me, Mr. Quillutt, on such terms as those!"

"But, my dear fellow——"

"Not another word, sorr! I'm astonished that a representative of the British Crown should insult a British subject by asking um to traffic in his debts of honour."

Mr. Quillitt was abashed. It had occurred to him that the most economical way of securing the Minister's good offices would be to forgive him a debt he had contracted to the Consul in the vicissitudes of *écarté*. But he had not taken sufficient account of the sensitive pride which animates the breasts of those Irishmen whose ancestors were summoned to rule by the acclamations of their countrymen on the Hill of Tara. Nor, perhaps, had he appraised with sufficient exactitude the pecuniary value of the Prime Minister's "paper" in the modest estimation of its signatory.

There was nothing for it, Mr. Quillitt perceived, but to offer his Excellency something down, and the Consul at last resolved, after further reflection, to "go a monkey" (as he expressed it) out of his own pocket. If the *coup* came off, he might look to be reimbursed out of the secret service money; if it failed—well, he could still trust, he thought, to his superior force at *écarté* to compel the Prime Minister to disgorge some, if not the whole, of his gains. He

accordingly lost no time in arranging the matter by the despatch of a cheque for the amount above specified, and sat down to draft an artfully worded communication to the Foreign Office, informing that department that he had "just received through his Excellency General The O'Mara Molloy, the able and distinguished Minister of his Majesty the King of Porcolongu, information which left no room for doubt that the French Government were meditating the almost immediate annexation of the group"; that "his Majesty had, at any rate, instructed his Prime Minister to say that he viewed the present position of affairs with extreme apprehension, and to sound the representative of her Britannic Majesty at Porcolongu as to the willingness of the British Government to conclude a Treaty of Alliance and Protectorate with King Afseesova, whereby to secure his independence against the threatened attack." Mr. Quillitt went on to add that, "in the undeniably grave and urgent circumstances of the case, he had not felt himself warranted in rejecting definitely, and on his own authority, the overtures thus made to him; and had accordingly informed his Excellency the Prime Minister that, subject of course to the approval of her Majesty's Government, and on the distinct understanding that they were to be in no way bound by his action, he was willing to consider the draft of such a treaty, and to take all the preliminary steps required to put him in a position to sign it on receiving the due official authority to do so."

It need hardly be said that before despatching this telegram (and indeed before sending The O'Mara Molloy that oblong slip of argumentative paper which had finally convinced the Prime Minister of the necessity of a British

Protectorate of Porcolongu) Mr. Quillitt had taken the precaution of stipulating for an actual and immediate execution of the treaty on his Majesty's side. The instrument lay before him, duly signed, as he was putting the final touches to his telegram. It contained only three clauses, but was conceived in perfectly clear and satisfactory terms.

"Had you much difficulty in obtaining his Majesty's signature?" inquired Quillitt of the Prime Minister, eyeing the subscription with a somewhat doubting air.

"Devil a ha'p'orth!" was the ready reply. "Hwhy would there be anny? Ye just prop um up a bit and hold uz hand."

"The Royal sign-manual seems a little less bold and firm than I should have expected from a man of his Majesty's character," said the Consul, still doubtful.

"Bedad! it's furrum enough for a man in his Majesty's condition," said the Minister, with a twinkle.

"Did your audience last so long, then?" asked Mr. Quillitt.

"As long as the matayrials," was the reply. "We didn't leave a ddrop in the bottle."

"H'm," said the Consul, still inspecting the signature; "the right-hand stroke is good enough, but the left-hand one's very jumpy—barely intersects the other at all, in fact. However, I've seen worse—on a ballot-paper—and your counter-signature binds *you*, in any case."

Mr. Quillitt's telegram was despatched accordingly, and he waited with considerable confidence for an approving reply from Lord St. Jingo. Unfortunately, however, it was some weeks since the last mail had brought news from England, and Lord St. Jingo; instead of guiding the foreign

policy of the country from Downing Street, was at that moment enjoying the sweets of newly-recovered liberty at his country house. A change of ministry had occurred since Mr. Quillitt's last advices, and Lord Shivers of Shakerley had succeeded to his rival's place. . A week did not elapse before the Consul received an agitated telegram in the following words : “*Suspend negotiations at once. Despatch follows*” ; and with the arrival of the mail a few hours later, bringing word of the political events which had taken place, the whole mystery was explained. Mr. Quillitt at once divined that his counsels of *haute politique* had been rejected with something like dismay by the new Foreign Secretary, and began to apprehend a wigging for himself. In the despatch from Downing Street which reached him a few weeks later he found ample justification for his fears.

“I am directed to inform you,” wrote the Permanent Secretary, “that her Majesty’s Government, while fully sensible of the zeal by which you have been animated, and the promptitude with which you have acted, are unable to approve of the course which you have pursued. You will take an early opportunity of seeking another interview with his Excellency the Prime Minister of Porcolongu, and will inform him that her Majesty’s Government do not share the apprehensions which have been expressed by him on behalf of his Sovereign, and that they regard the step recommended by him as altogether premature. Her Majesty’s Government continue to receive assurances of the most friendly character from the Government of the French Republic, and they see no reason to believe that that Government entertains any designs of territorial acquisition in the Pacific. I am to add that though her Majesty’s Government

do not question the excellence of the motives which induced you to give provisional countenance to the proposal of a Protectorate, they cannot acquit you of a grave error of judgment in taking that course ; and, with a view to prevent the recurrence of any similar misunderstanding, I am to request that, before entertaining any future proposal which may be made to you by or on behalf of his Majesty the King of Porcolongu, you will submit it to her Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and await his instructions."

Having completed the perusal of this most disagreeable communication, Mr. Quillitt uttered a sentence which, without being actually a prayer, was not unlike one in point of grammatical construction. He posted off at once to the Prime Minister and flung down the despatch before him without a word. The O'Mara Molloy read it through with an unmoved countenance, folded it up, and returned it to his visitor.

"I congratulate ye, Mr. Quillutt," was all he said.

"Congratulate me ! What do you mean ? On what?"

"On the tranquillitee of your conscience, 'sorr," replied the Prime Minister, with much dignity. "It must be a great satisfaction to ye to reflect that, however blind your Government, you, at least, have done your duty to your counthry."

"Oh, ah ! yes, of course,—and all that," said Mr. Quillitt, though with but chastened enthusiasm. "But I say, Molloy—you know—that five hundred—eh ? Don't you think—wouldn't it be fairer—especially considering—eh ? What do you say ?"

But The O'Mara Molloy had said nothing. He was .

gazing out into the distance with a far-away look in his eyes, as though striving to descry the Hill of Tara through the haze of the centuries.

"Explain yourself, Mr. Quillutt," he said, after rousing himself with difficulty from his stately reverie.

"Well, there is not much to explain," said the Consul, nettled into plain speaking. "That five hundred you got was, of course, conditional on the execution of the treaty."

"No doubt, sorr," was the Minister's reply. "And that is why you insisted on his Majesty's executing it."

"His Majesty! Yes! But what I mean is that the treaty was to be executed on our side too."

"Then, hwhat the devil hinders ye from executing it?" said The O'Mara Molloy, rising from his chair with an air of sternness which indicated that the audience was closed. "Ye're thrifling with me, Mr. Quillutt, and bedad, sorr, there is no man living who shall thrifle with The O'Mara Molloy without ruun' ut."

The British Consul was not wanting in resolution, and, thoroughly understanding his man, he would have taken his chance of "ruun' ut" if he had thought the moment a favourable one for a quarrel. But he was forced to admit to himself that after all there was something to be said for the Prime Minister's interpretation of their bargain, and, moreover, he did not yet feel sure that the draft treaty might not pay for itself after all. Mr. Quillitt, it is scarcely necessary to say, had not relied wholly on so doubtful an informant for intelligence as to the designs of France. He had prosecuted inquiries in other quarters, notably of the German Consul, Herr Wolkenkopf, a simple-minded, easily-handled Teuton, an ardent naturalist, with apparently no

thought or ambition connected with anything besides his hobby. The Machiavellian Mr. Quillitt had early conceived the idea of playing off one of these two foreign officials against the other, and as they consorted a good deal together, he immediately made it his business to pump the Herr for any information which he might have gathered in the confidence of social intercourse as to the diplomatic or other designs of Monsieur. And when he found, as he immediately did, that the attitude of M. de Chauvin, and the mysterious hints let fall by him from time to time, had aroused suspicion even in the unsuspecting heart of Herr Wolkenkopf himself (or so at least that artless child of nature averred), why, Mr. Quillitt concluded, not unreasonably, that The O'Mara Molloy's warnings had confirmation enough. The French Government, he argued, must pretty soon open the eyes of Downing Street to their real intentions, and unless then they were very prompt in executing them, the draft Treaty of Protectorate, now safe in Mr. Quillitt's desk, would rapidly rise in value in the estimation of a panic-stricken English Foreign Office. All which considerations combined to reconcile Mr. Quillitt to "lying out of his monkey" for a time (as he described it in a phrase which may be commended to foreign professors of the English language), and determined him on playing a waiting game.

The waiting game, however, turned out to be a very long one ; and the French Government appeared to be in no hurry to perform the expected ophthalmic operation upon Downing Street. Weeks passed, and the island of Porco-longu remained unannexed to the territories of the French Republic. M. de Chauvin made no sign, and the reluctant mind of Mr. Quillitt submitted itself gradually to the un-

comfortable conviction that he had been “sold.” The scion of Irish kings had bamboozled him, he began to fear, by a mere cock-and-bull story of French designs, and had left him five hundred pounds the poorer for having believed it. He said nothing either to The O’Mara Molloy or to any one else; but the imposture of which he had been made the victim was never out of his mind, and he spent many a sleepless night in revolving innumerable schemes of retaliation, or at the very least of reimbursement. It was some consolation to reflect that the luck had gone against him of late at *écarté*, and that, as he had taken the precaution of not paying his recent losses to the Prime Minister, he was now considerably in the latter’s debt.

One night, about four months after the costly negotiation into which he had been so rashly induced to enter, Mr. Quillitt and the Prime Minister sat battling together at *écarté* in the Consul’s den. Her Britannic Majesty’s representative had had emphatically a bad time. The luck had run for hours without an interruption in favour of the high-born Irishman, and that in such an overwhelming tide of good fortune that his opponent’s undoubtedly superior skill had been utterly powerless to make head against it. The Consul’s debt had doubled and trebled since they sat down, and when at a little after midnight he threw aside the cards in disgust, he found that his losses were close upon £300. Mr. Quillitt made the addition with some difficulty—for he had been drinking hard latterly—and, in the excitement of loss, a good deal too hard to allow him the full command of his faculties. At the same time, and by a confusion between subject and object which is very common among a certain class of the intoxicated, he was confidently persuaded that

the more liquor he consumed the more helpless became the drunkenness of his companion.

"Molloy," said Mr. Quillitt, after eyeing the Prime Minister for a few minutes with an air of pity for his deplorable condition, "would you like me to pay you what I owe you?"

His creditor signified, with a courteous shrug, that though he was in no violent hurry he would not refuse to receive payment if it were offered him.

The Consul rose from his chair, walked with a somewhat unsteady step to his *escritoire*, which he unlocked and opened with a still more unsteady hand, and, returning to the table with the Treaty of Alliance and Protectorate, "I have here, your Excellency," he said, his liquid consonants giving almost an Italian sound to his pronunciation of the last word, "a security of the value of £500, which I shall be happy to tender you in payment of my debt. Not a word!" he continued quickly, and with a deprecatory wave of his hand, on seeing that The O'Mara Molloy was about to interrupt him. "Not a word! I am aware that the value is greater by two-fifths than the amount of my debt; but I waive the difference, sir, I waive the difference. Do you accept my offer?"

Surprise is not an emotion which, as a rule, depicts itself with facility on the countenance of a man who has consumed a bottle and a half of trade rum; but it was plainly visible on the face of Mr. Quillitt when the Prime Minister of Porcolongu for all answer produced a little sheaf of the Consul's I.O.U.'s, and, tossing them to him across the table, deliberately folded up the draft treaty and put it in his pocket.

"Good Heavens!" muttered Mr. Quillitt to himself, half sobered by his astonishment. "He is more drunk than I imagined. Ought I to take such an advantage of him?"

Promptitude of decision in difficult circumstances is second nature to a diplomatist, and the Consul instantaneously decided that he ought. He had sufficient command of himself to make the dignified bow of a man who is conscious of conferring a favour, but is too generous to grudge it.

The Prime Minister finished his glass and took his leave, and in a few minutes his host, after carefully removing all his clothing with the exception of one boot, retired meditatively to rest.

On awaking, his head (save that it ached consumedly) contained no record of the previous night's proceedings. A glance, however, at his open desk, and at his I.O.U.'s lying on the table, struck dully on one of the slack chords of his memory, and he slowly raised himself to a sitting posture in bed, the better to view the situation. Yes: there was no doubt of it. He had re-sold the useless treaty to its author—useless even if the French designs on Porcolongu were not pure inventions of his, because Downing Street had so peremptorily rejected it—and had extinguished a debt of three hundred pounds by the transaction. Decidedly the illustrious Irishman must have been very far gone in liquor. Indeed, now that Mr. Quillitt set to work to recall his speech and manner, it occurred to him that seldom in the whole course of his life had he seen a man more hopelessly intoxicated. His diplomatic conscience assured him that he had done right in taking advantage of the Prime Minister's unguarded condition of mind in order to rid

himself of his bad bargain. He accordingly went about his not very onerous official duties that day as composedly as Socrates on the morning after the Symposium, and it was not till nearly nightfall that the blow fell. The western waters were glowing in all the glory of a Pacific sunset when a telegram was placed in the Consul's hands, but only to fall helplessly from them the moment its contents were read : “*Renew negotiations instantly treaty alliance protectorate Porcolongu. Assure King sympathy support British Government. Despatch follows.*”

The Pacific Ocean swam before Mr. Quillitt's agitated eyes. He put his hand to his brow, and leaned against the wattled wall of Government House for support. What did it—what could it mean ?

He had not long to wait for the explanation. Early next morning he received a private despatch from a somewhat highly-placed friend in the Foreign Office in these terms : “*Liberals out on Conservative amendment four acres cow. St. Jingo back again. Congratulate you.*”

St. Jingo back again ! All was clear, and Mr. Quillitt was ready to tear the few remaining locks from his head in disgust at his own impatient folly. There was but one thing to be done. The treaty must be re-purchased from The O'Mara Molloy if it cost the Consul all the savings of his official life to do it. But caution (diplomatic caution) was necessary. It would never do to allow the astute Polynesian statesman to suspect that his friend had any very important object to gain in attempting to repossess himself of the draft treaty.

“ I have it,” said Mr. Quillitt to himself after a few moments' cogitation. “ I will pretend that it was I who

was drunk, and that I only handed him over the treaty in a tipsy freak, which I understood him to be merely humouring—as a sober man—ha ! ha !—will occasionally do with an intoxicated companion. Yes, it would certainly be better to pretend that I took too much last night.” And full of this profound project of dissimulation he betook himself to the Prime Minister’s shanty.

“ Molloy,” he said, with his most diplomatic assumption of carelessness, “ do you know I am afraid I rather exceeded the bounds of moderation the other night, when you made such an example of me at *écarté*.”

“ Not a bit, me boy, not at bit,” replied the Prime Minister cheerfully. “ I never saw you play a better game. Luck was against ye, that was all.”

“ Oh ! as to the game,—that may be,” said Mr. Quillitt, still outwardly indifferent, though his anxiety deepened apace at the line which his companion was taking ; “ I can play *écarté* well enough, however far gone I am. What I am thinking of is not how I played, but how I paid. It was a foolish trick of me to square accounts with you by handing back that treaty.”

“ A foolish thrick ye call it,” said his Excellency calmly. “ And hwhy, pray ? ”

“ Well—er—er—well, my dear fellow—for a diplomatist—you know—eh ? —to part with a document like that—a public document—it would be thought rather--eh ? ”

“ Bedad, sorr, I should have supposed it would have been thought a divilish deal more foolish thrick for a Prime Minister to buy back such a documint,” said the other, looking at the Consul through half-closed eyes ; “ a threaty which your Government declines to execute.”

"Exactly, precisely," exclaimed Mr. Quillitt, catching eagerly at the new pretext thus offered to him. "I never supposed you were serious in accepting it from me. I thought you were merely humouring a friend who had had a drop too much. I couldn't think of holding you to so absurd a bargain ; so I have brought you back my I.O.U.'s," producing them from his pocket, "and if you've got the treaty handy we'll swop at once."

"Misther Quillutt," said his Excellency, drawing himself up with his stateliest air, "I don't understand ye. I'm perfectly sathisfied with me bargain, and mean to abide by ut."

"What !" exclaimed the Consul, with increasing agitation. "You can't be serious—impossible. The whole thing was a joke. You couldn't have meant to have let me off a debt of nearly three hundred pounds for the recovery of a worthless——"

"Worthless !" cried the Irishman, bursting into a laugh. "Then hwhy the divil d'ye want ut back ?"

Mr. Quillitt made no answer. Obviously there was none which he could make without deciding upon the pitiable diplomatic expedient of telling the truth.

"Molloy," he said, after a few moments of discomfited pause, "you're too many for me, at diplomacy as well as at *écarté*. Look here, I'll make a clean breast of it," and he put his last official telegram into the Prime Minister's hand. "You see now," he continued eagerly, "why I want that treaty back again. It's a matter of life and death to my official future to recover and execute it on behalf of the British Government. And I'm sure, as an old friend, Molloy, you'll not stand in my way ; even if," he added, with

a keen glance at his companion, “even if you have at the moment some other political combination in your head.”

Mr. Quillitt stopped for a moment to see whether this last remark of his would elicit any disclaimer. But, none coming, he resumed his solicitations with increased anxiety.

“See here, my dear fellow, here are my I.O.U’s. Take them back again. No, no ! You must—I insist !” exclaimed the Consul, as he almost forced them into the Prime Minister’s palm. “And if a cheque for another two or even three hundred is necessary to arrange the business, it shall be forthcoining. But I *must* get that treaty back again, and execute it on behalf of my Government at once.”

But still his Excellency made no sign. He was plunged in reflection so profound that Mr. Quillitt had time to get out his cheque-book in great agitation, and to insinuate between the statesman’s fingers a cheque for a substantial sum before he roused himself from his reverie.

“Misther Quillutt,” he then said, at the same time absently folding up the slip of paper which had been pressed upon him ; “Misther Quillutt, I will do what I can for ye. But it’s impossible for the treaty to be executed to-day.”

“Impossible ! Why ?”

“I must consult hus Majesty.”

“Consult a rum-cask ! Come, come, my dear Molloy. We are augurs of long enough standing to permit ourselves a—”

“Enough, sorr !” interrupted the Minister, with dignity. “It’s absolutely necessary to lay the matter before his Majesty. Come again to-morrow.”

“But why not submit it to him to-day ? The Palace is

only a step from here," said the Consul, glancing through the window of the Minister's study at its sun-baked walls.

"His Majesty," said The O'Mara Molloy, "is not yet in a condition to grant me an audience. Herr Wolkenkopf attended at the Palace the day before yesterday to show the king a sample of some remarkably fine old schnapps which he had just received from a relation at Amsterdam, and his Majesty, I understand, does not intend to resume official or ceremonial duties until to-morrow."

To this, of course, there was nothing to be said, and Mr. Quillitt accordingly took his leave, in some disquietude of mind. Some hundred yards from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he happened to turn round and look back—just in time to see a figure disappearing rapidly through its open door.

It was impossible to mistake those elegant proportions—M. de Chauvin!

A dark suspicion shot through the Consul's breast, and passing downwards like a charge of electricity rooted his feet to the earth. Could *this* be the explanation of the Minister's having so readily bought back the treaty? Could it be that he had another purchaser for it in his business-like eye? Was it possible that the hereditary enemy of the Saxon was about to strike a blow (for a consideration) at the secular oppressors of his race, and that, in plain prose, The O'Mara Molloy had been squared by the French?

Painfully revolving these agitating questions in his mind, Mr. Quillitt walked slowly homeward, to pass the most unquiet night that ever beat out its lagging hours in a sleepless brain. At noon next day he betook himself, in

full official costume, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but only to find to his intense anxiety, and even alarm, that the Prime Minister was not to be seen. He had set off early in the morning, his private secretary said, by his Majesty's special command, to visit one of the distant islands of the group.

Mr. Quillitt now began to feel more and more convinced that he, and probably Porcolongu, was being sold. Having satisfied himself, however, that the private secretary had told him the truth, and that his Excellency had really departed on the alleged journey, he was fain to seek such reassurance as he could gather from the reflection that, unless the mischief was done already—a thought at which the spinal column of the Consul, from the cerebellum downwards, underwent the sensation commonly produced by the cold-water jet of the shampooer—no negotiation with M. de Chauvin could take place till the Prime Minister's return.

A day passed ; two, three, a week, and no Prime Minister. But instead thereof, another cipher telegram from Downing Street, which brought out a light dew of perspiration on Mr. Quillitt's brow. Thus it ran : "*News received French ironclad left Noumea destined probably Porcolongu. Inform Foreign Office immediately whether treaty concluded.*" In desperation, Mr. Quillitt telegraphed back : "*Negotiations still pending. Hope conclude treaty this week.*" This done, it occurred to him, as the only step he could take in The O'Mara Molloy's absence, that he might pay a visit to Herr Wolkenkopf, and after ascertaining whether he, with his usually excellent information, had heard anything of this reported French movement, endeavour to enlist his support

in resisting the piratical policy of M. de Chauvin's Government.

He found the German Consul with his microscope before him, and his note-books around him, calmly arranging his specimens.

"Wolkenkopf, my good soul," said Quillitt, in that kindly but slightly patronising tone in which he was in the habit of addressing the dreamy *savant*, "what do you say to this report just transmitted to me from my Government?" And he read out the alarming telegram.

"What say I, mine friend?" said the Herr, looking placidly at him. "But what then should I say? You know better as I whether your Government true-speaks or not."

"Nonsense, Wolkenkopf; don't trifle with me. People can only be sure of speaking the truth when they know the truth, and our Government never knows anything. *You* know that."

"Do you not say we know everything in Berlin, dear Herr Consul?" said the German, beaming with mild satire through his spectacles. "And many people who know not everything know so much as you last said."

"Have you heard anything of this naval movement of the French from the sources of information from which you heard of their political designs? You still have access to those sources, I suppose?" asked Mr. Quillitt, sharply, for he was gradually getting to suspect everybody.

"Yes-well," replied Herr Wolkenkopf. "Through them, mine friend, I hear nothing. I believe not, so I may my own information trust, that any French ironclad is coming here at all."

"Ha!" exclaimed the British Consul, greatly relieved. "I am right glad to hear you say so; I hoped myself that the danger was not quite so imminent as that. But still, I think there *is* danger of a French annexation, don't you, Wolkenkopf? You won't undertake to say that my Government may lay aside its anxieties on that point, altogether? Eh?"

"No, dear Herr," said the man of science, carefully focussing a specimen while he applied his eye to the tube of his microscope. "No, dear Herr, I would not—go—quite—so far as that. I would not so—undertake to limit—"—here followed a rather long pause, during which the brass screw of the focussing gear revolved now forward now backward, through minute and ever-lessening arcs, between the naturalist's finger and thumb—"to limit"—and here he looked up with a sigh of relief at the successful conclusion of the delicate operation he had been engaged in—"the enterprising instincts of *la gr-r-rande nation.*"

"Herr Wolkenkopf," said Mr. Quillitt gravely, "you are well aware that I share your suspicions. I am convinced that the Government of the French Republic entertain designs upon the independence of this group, which, unless a firm front is offered to them by the representatives of other European Powers, will very shortly be realised. May I—may I count upon your support in my endeavour to counteract them?"

Herr Wolkenkopf rose from his chair, replaced his spectacles, which had been temporarily removed for microscopic purposes, on his nose, and gazing through them with a look of the greatest candour and benevolence that the human countenance is capable of expressing, replied, "Dear

and respected colleague, I have always confided in your discretion, nor know I any reason why I should now conceal from you that the instructions I have from my Government received, direct me to resist any French designs on the independence of Porcolongu by every means in my power. I think I may assure you, dear Herr, that these islands will not be allowed, if it is any way possible for my Government to prevent it, to pass under the flag of the French Republic."

Mr. Quillitt was too delighted to reply in words. He could only grasp his German colleague's hand by way of answer; and he took his leave in a state of as high complacency as we may suppose to have suffused the mind of Sir William Temple after successfully negotiating the Triple Alliance.

Another day came and went without bringing home the truant Minister. On the evening, however, of the second day, Mr. Quillitt, whose house commanded a view of the landing-stage, and who accordingly seldom took his eyes from it, saw The O'Mara Molloy disembark from the Government yacht, which, in his capacity of First Lord of the Admiralty, he had placed at his own service as First Lord of the Treasury of Porcolongu, and walk with rapid steps to his official residence.

"Good," muttered Mr. Quillitt to himself. "To-morrow, my friend, I bring you and your royal master to book."

A couple of hours later another telegram reached him from the Foreign Office, thus conceived : "*News despatch French ironclad confirmed. If treaty concluded communicate it French Consul, adding British Government cannot indifference view attack independence allied Sovereign.*"

"H'm," said the British Consul reflectively. "I'll conclude

the treaty, if possible, the first thing to-morrow morning, and make my representations to De Chauvin immediately afterwards. If I don't succeed in concluding the treaty—if that Irish rascal, or the fuddled savage whom he serves and sells, is playing me false—well, I'll associate myself with Wolkenkopf, and we'll make a joint representation to the Frenchman."

Mr. Quillitt passed a quieter night than he had had for some time past, and rose betimes in excellent spirits. His bedroom window looked out on the bay, and as he gazed across its sunlit waters upon the lustrous expanse of ocean beyond, he felt a thrill of patriotic pride at the thought that it should have fallen to his lot to plant the British flag on a new point of vantage in that golden world. In the midst of these inspiring reflections Mr. Quillitt's eye fell upon a distant object in the offing. He started violently, and the hair-brush fell from his hand. Its place was instantly filled by a powerful binocular, which the Consul hastily brought to bear on the approaching vessel. Yes, there was no mistaking its squat and swarthy hull, its ungainly and forbidding lines. It was a powerful ironclad steaming rapidly towards the bay.

Mr. Quillitt was dressed in a twinkling, and half-way to the Prime Minister's house before he was five minutes older. As he skirted the little curve of shining sand which had to be traversed to reach it, two figures caught his eye—one that of M. de Chauvin striding rapidly in the direction of the Palace, the other that of Herr Wolkenkopf, in quite unofficial costume, a palm-leaf hat on his head and satchel at his side, dredging away as tranquilly as though there were no such things as international rivalries in the world.

Hurried as he was, the British Consul halted for a moment at the naturalist's elbow. "Look," he said, thrusting the binocular into the other's hand, and pointing towards the ironclad.

Her Wolkenkopf calmly inspected the approaching vessel, and returned the glass to its owner with the single monosyllable, "Zo!"

"You will support me, Wolkenkopf," said Mr. Quillitt, pale, but firm, "in protesting against this act of piracy on the part of France?"

"Mine friend," replied the German, quietly, "I promise you I will protest against anything of the kind. But where go you, dear Herr? To the Minister's? He is not to house. He is at the Palace with M. de Chauvin."

"At the palace with M. de Chauvin? Then there is not a moment to be lost. Follow me, Wolkenkopf."

And hurrying across the court-yard, Mr. Quillitt sprang up the broad bamboo staircase three steps at a time, and dashed unceremoniously into the audience-chamber.

It was as he expected. M. de Chauvin and The O'Mara Molloy were seated at a table with an official-looking document, which the Consul recognised at a glance, before them. A treaty! with the royal sign-manual ("A week old, no doubt," thought Quillitt bitterly) at its foot, the Prime Minister's counter-signature opposite, and the ink still wet with which the Frenchman had just executed it.

"What means this intrusion, sorr?" said the Prime Minister, rising with dignity from his chair.

"You infernal swin—But stay, my first business is with you, M. de Chauvin. Ah! here is Wolkenkopf. In the name, Monsieur, of our respective Governments, we protest

against the act of piracy which——” He waved his hand towards the window, all eyes following it, but stopped dead in the tracks of his remonstrance. For the ironclad had hove-to about a quarter of a mile from the shore. Up flew her colours to the peak, and loud exclamations in English, French, and Irish broke simultaneously from three of the persons in the room.

IT WAS THE GERMAN FLAG !

The three ejaculators turned fiercely on their silent companion. Herr Wolkenkopf slowly drew a document from his pocket, and opened it before their eyes. All recognised at once the bold but simple signature “*× Afseesova II., his mark.*” But the treaty was not countersigned by the Prime Minister.

“The King, sorr,” exclaimed the descendant of kings, “has been guilty of a gross braych of the Constitution. Your threaty is not worth the paper ut’s written on !”

“No !” said the Herr placidly. “But *that*,” pointing through the window at the surly visitor in the bay—“that is worth much paper, and many writings. Not true ?”

The Prime Minister and the British Consul owned to themselves that it was true. M. de Chauvin audibly attested his consciousness of its truth by execrating “the name of a cabbage.”

“But,” cried Mr. Quillitt, gradually recovering his senses, “how did you—? when did he——?”

“Mine friend,” said the German, looking at him with benevolent humour in his mild blue eyes, “I took evening meal with his Majesty yesterday. The schnapps was *schön*, and——”

The O’Mara Molloy sprang forward and roughly plucked

aside the curtain of rush matting which divided the audience-chamber from the throne-room. There on his back lay the monarch who, like Diocletian, Charles the Fifth, and other weary royal souls before him, had with his own hand divested himself of the burden of rule. At his side reposed three black bottles of a quaint shape. They were perfectly empty, but the legend on their labels showed that they had contained the finest Schiedam.

THE PROGRESS OF HUMANITY.

Dr. Juenemann has compounded a fluid which, in his opinion, is destined entirely to revolutionise modern warfare, and put a stop to the horrible carnage with which wars are at present inevitably conducted. His plan is to burst a shell containing this fluid, which, on liberation, is converted into a gas, under the effect of which every living being within a considerable space becomes unconscious, and remains so for two or three hours.

I.

NEAR the nineteenth century's closing
(All the world in peace reposing)

Suddenly the rumour ran,
“ War's grim horrors, felt too often,
Good Juenemann will soften ”
(Please pronounce “ You-any-man ”).

“ Now he's made the thing a study
War will cease from being bloody,
And will only cause a smell.
Blessings, then, on modern science
And its last humane appliance,
The Narcotic Vapour Shell !

“ Boom of gun and rifle's rattle
Shall no more be heard in battle
Once the Doctor's shell has burst ;

All the interest will be focussed
 On the question who are hoccus'd
 By their adversaries first.

“ Softly these will sink to slumber,
 While their weapons, useless lumber,
 At their feet abandoned lie ;
 Which secured and piled, the others
 Will approach their sleeping brothers,
 And restoratives apply.

“ ‘ Waken, brethren, foes no longer,’
 Stronger thus, and ever stronger,
 Will arise the friendly shout.
 ‘ Ended ere we’d well begun it
 Is the fight ; our shell has won it ;
 Now be yours the shelling out.’ ”

“ Blessings then on modern science
 For its last humane appliance,
 And on him who framed the plan.
 War’s no more a brutal *battue*. ”
 So they raised a stately statue
 To the good Juenemann.

II.

Years rolled on and times grew milder,
 All the primitive and wilder
 Human passions sank to rest ;
 And the public admiration
 For the Doctor’s innovation
 Was less heartily expressed.

Men began to view with coldness
One who with such callous boldness
 Could an army drug by stealth,
Careless, his designs pursuing,
How much harm he might be doing
 To that army's future health.

" How could he," in accents fretful
Murmured they, " be thus forgetful,
 Wrapped in his unscrupulous art,
That the rifle or the sabre
May be borne by men who labour
 With affections of the heart ?

" Some perchance may not recover,
All of them are bound to suffer
 In the body or the mind,
More or less, from that reaction
Which narcotic stupefaction
 Almost always leaves behind."

So the local papers trounced him,
Crowds assembled and denounced him
 Till they made their victim flinch,
Smashed his windows, broke his image
Mobbed him in an ugly scrimmage,
 Threatened him with Justice Lynch.

Then the conscience-stricken Doctor
Doubtful whether to be shocked or
 Furious at his altered plight,

Making but a weak contention
For his devilish invention,
Gave it up and took to flight.

Fled beyond his country's border,
Entered a monastic order
For his life's remaining span ;
And, from all his fellows parted,
Lingered on, a broken-hearted,
Penitent Juenemann.

THE BRUTES ON THEIR MASTER.

NO one seemed disposed to break the silence : the Fox surveyed their confusion with a malicious smile.

"After all," he continued carelessly, the company still remaining mute, "I don't know that it matters much to me. The conditions of my own life will not be materially affected, whatever course you take."

"Not affected!" struck in the Dog quickly. "Oh, come, that is a little too much. Why, surely, if you could induce us to act on your advice, you would——"

"Allow me to finish, if you please," interrupted the other, with a touch of irritation. "I should, even in that case, find it just as hard a matter to live ; I should be shot and trapped instead of hunted, that is all. Nay, I might, perhaps, be worse off, as some people would consider it, than I am now. For I am told, and I see no particular reason to doubt it, that if it had not suited Man to preserve us for the purposes of sport, our race would long since have become extinct. By detaching the Horse and Dog from Man, and thus rendering the fox-hunt an impossibility, we should in fact be removing the main factor in our perpetuation."

"Why are you trying to do it then?" inquired the Cat-lazily, opening one eye to watch the effect of his question.

"Why?" echoed the Fox, with impatience. "Because I

hate to see people being made fools of, as you are ; and because I would rather take my chance of fighting for existence, under some additional disadvantages, than see the simplicity of worthy animals abused by a hypocritical oppressor."

"Ha!" muttered the Cat. "A disinterested Fox! I appreciate your motives. And," added he, dreamily, "I will not mention the word 'chickens.'"

"With your antecedents, you will exercise a wise discretion in not doing so," said the Fox tartly; "and let me tell you, my friend, that it is a matter of perfect indifference to me whether you appreciate my motives or not. My appeal is made to animals, not only of a superior intelligence to yours, but of a far higher morality than you have ever shown yourself capable of conceiving."

The Cat returned no answer to this taunt. He was asleep.

After a short pause, during which the Dog appeared lost in painful reflection, the Fox, in a still more insinuating tone, resumed.

"It is," he said, "precisely because I entertain so sincere a respect for that combination of moral and intellectual qualities which I find in you, and in our friend the Horse, here, that I have thought it worth my while to lay these proposals of mine before you. It needs nothing less than that combination of qualities to enable you to be of any real service to us. We are all of us, as I hold, either persecuted, or exploited, or in some way or other ill-used by Man. To every one of us he plays the part either of open enemy, or designing patron, or treacherous comrade, as the case may be. But some among us, as, for instance, that poor silly

thing there," with a sidelong glance of contempt at the Sheep hard by, "are both morally and mentally too weak to offer any resistance. Others, though not wanting in intelligence, strength, or courage, are unfortunately so situated as to be unable to render any effective help to the common cause. Others, again, though intellectually well fitted to devise a plan of revolt, and even to direct its execution, have not been fortunate enough, for some reason or other," —here the Fox coughed with an air of constraint—"to win the confidence of their fellow brutes. The Dog and the Horse, however, fulfil all the conditions required in leaders of a movement of emancipation. They have wit enough to see through Man's pretences to virtue, moral sense enough to be disgusted at his baseness, and more power of annoying and injuring him than all the rest of us put together. What say you, then? Will you join in the league of the lower animals, as my lord call us, against him?"

"Not I!" replied the Dog promptly, all his doubts dispersed at once by the mere shock of the proposal. "Not I! He's far too good."

"Nor I," said the Horse, though with less enthusiasm. "He's much too strong."

"Too strong!" echoed the Dog reproachfully. "Is *that* all? I thought you loved him as I do."

The Horse looked mildly at him for a moment before replying.

"I never said I did not," he added presently. "But perhaps I see more of his strength than you do."

"I have more respect for your objection at any rate than for his," said the Fox, in a slightly contemptuous tone, "but there is nothing in it. You don't suppose that I ad-

vocate anything like open resistance to our tyrant. I quite admit that he is too strong to allow any chance of success for *that*. No, what I mean is that Man is dependent upon you for a vast number of willingly rendered services; that he relies and has to rely in a hundred matters on the unforced zeal and docility of the Horse, and that were he suddenly to lose the benefit of these qualities, and find himself unable to get any more out of the Horse than he could wring from him by absolute physical compulsion incessantly applied, he would find the situation intolerable."

"So should we, I expect," said the Horse drily.

"No doubt it would be disagreeable to you for a time," admitted the Fox. "But with your well-known fortitude you could surely tire him out. Besides, you continually have not only his comfort at your disposal but his life in your power. Think of the number of necks you might break by concerted action in a single day."

"You don't tell me what I am to do, however," said the Dog. "For what services, pray, is Man so dependent upon me? I should think he could make a shift to do without hunting, and he seems to like shooting best without me. What could *I* do to injure him?"

"This is mere affectation," sneered the Fox. "You know as well as I do that you are as necessary to Man in one way as the horse is in another. He wants toys no less than tools, and you are toys to which he has become so accustomed that he could not do without you. Affection he calls his feeling for you, and you no doubt are weak enough to believe him. But, anyhow, you have grown into a habit with him, and it would throw the whole human race into selfish

consternation to learn some fine morning that no Dog would ever again lick man's hand."

There was a diabolical twinkle in the Fox's eye as he uttered these words, but his tact told him the next moment that he had gone too far. The last suggestion seemed to fall upon the Dog like a blow. He winced, and rose instantly to his feet.

"I will wish you good-night!" he said coldly. "It is no use my staying here any longer. Nothing in the world should induce me to do what you ask."

"Sit down again, pray," said the Fox earnestly, "and listen to me. I don't expect you to do what I am asking you as long as your feelings towards Man remain what they are. But surely I have already said enough to show you how misplaced is your regard for him. What! not when I mention that ugly word again?"

The Dog shuddered slightly, but remained silent.

"Not when I mention vivisec——"

"No," said the Dog, in a tone almost of irritation. "I wish to hear no more about that. It ought to be enough for you to know that it doesn't in any degree alter my feelings towards Man."

"Oh, that's impossible," replied the Fox coolly. "Or at least, if it is possible, you must be in one sense as great an impostor as he is. What is the good of Man's having elevated your moral nature as he pretends to have done? What is the use of his having developed all the virtues in you if you can't feel now that your patron's vile heartlessness and hypocrisy deprive him of all title to respect? Why, even that wretched Rabbit there, who cowers down when I merely mention his name, even he has conscience enough

to appreciate the villainy of vivisection, if he has not sufficient force of character to condemn it. His brother was netted along with several friends and sold to a vivisector. He witnessed the whole performance in the person of one of his friends before fortunately making his own escape. Hi ! Bunny ! tell us what you think of cutting rabbits up alive."

The Rabbit glanced timidly round him as though afraid of being overheard, and then replied, in a hurried, trembling whisper :

"I don't know. Don't ask me. It's bad—very bad. But—but my mother's hind legs were broken with a shot yesterday, and she has just crawled home. She's lying over there behind the hedge. I'm not sure shooting ain't worse than the other."

" You're a fool !" said the Fox, somewhat disconcerted at this display of independent judgment on the Rabbit's part. " The sportsman kills outright a dozen times for once that he wounds. But the very object of the other wretch is to keep his victim alive as long as he can. Besides, that isn't the worst part of the matter by any means. Who cares what happens to us,—you, Bunny, I mean, and me ? Man has never pretended to be *our* friend ; he dislikes me and he despises you. If he ever condescends to do anything but shoot you it is only to put you into a hutch as a toy for his children. You rank merely as a larger sort of guinea-pig or white mouse ; while as for me," continued the Fox, significantly, " well, he has never tried to make a friend of *me*—not *much*. And between ourselves he is not far wrong. Anyhow he is welcome to vivisect me, when he can take me alive and persuade me to lie quietly on the operating table without trying a previous experiment in vivisection on my

own account." And here Reynard bared his formidable rows of teeth in an extremely sinister grin. "To cut up a fox or a rabbit may be as cruel as you please, but you can't exactly call it base. Even to operate on a cat," added the Fox, evidently not sorry to deal a side blow at his satirical companion, "even to operate on a cat, domestic animal as he is called, appears to me to be much the same thing."

"What's that you're saying?" asked the Cat, drowsily.

"I was saying," repeated the Fox in his blandest tones, "that, though they call you a domestic animal, I don't believe that you feel any particular affection towards Man, at least in a disinterested way; and that as he is probably conscious of that, he is more or less justified in treating you like one of us. What do you think about it yourself?"

"What do I think about what?" asked the Cat, with as much impatience as he was capable of showing.

"Well, do you feel particularly disgusted at the thought of Man's putting one of your species to a cruel death?"

"I should feel particularly disgusted at the thought of Man's putting *me* to a cruel death," was the reply.

"But more so at its being done by Man than by your natural enemy, the Dog?"

"Not a bit more," said the Cat, calmly. "Why should I?"

"Precisely the answer I expected," said the Fox, with a chuckle. "Then if you feel no deeper sense of injury, no keener throb of pain at being tortured by Man than by the Dog, you must be in reality as far apart from Man as we are, and he is under no obligation to treat you otherwise than as one of us. What do you say to that?"

"Nothing," said the Cat, upon whom a fresh "exposition

of sleep" was rapidly gaining. "Nothing. The question has no interest for me."

"Exactly. Then you may go to sleep again. Man, I say, might have destroyed or tortured us all—foxes, rabbits, sheep, even cats, without proving anything more than the hardness of his heart—without exhibiting himself, I mean, as an ungrateful and treacherous villain. But the Dog, his comrade for a thousand years, the friend of his fireside, the companion of his walks, the guardian of his flocks, the sentry in his house, nay, the very saviour of his life on the snowfield or in the flood, the animal whom he boasts of having raised almost to equality with himself—that Man should torture *him*! By Heaven!" cried the Fox, in a well-simulated outburst of honest indignation, "it is infamous!"

There was another silence, broken only by the low purring of the Cat. Upon the more intelligent members of the assembly this last stroke of the Fox's had not been without its effect. The Dog in particular, in spite of the firmness with which he had proclaimed his fidelity to Man, was evidently a prey to very strong emotions of doubt and pain.

"I do not believe," he said at last, "that Man often does torture the Dog in this way."

"Not so often as the Rabbit, it is true; but why? Because the rabbit is cheaper, no other reason. In the same way, no doubt, it would cost a man less to cut up children of his own begetting than to have to buy other people's; but I don't think the economy would be regarded in that case as a sufficient excuse. That Man should ever have vivisected the Dog at all is enough in itself to brand him as the vilest creature in the creation."

"I don't know," said the Horse, thoughtfully, "that one is quite justified in saying that of the whole race. There are brutes of course among—"

"There are what?" interrupted the Fox, sharply.

"I—I—mean," said the Horse, a little confused, "I mean what they themselves call 'brutes.'"

"Ay," said the Fox, in a tone of profound bitterness. "I know what you mean. And it shows how completely domestication has alienated your sympathies from your own people, that you have picked up the very cant of insult from our common oppressor. It is we who should rather stigmatise unusual cruelty or treachery among members of the brute creation, by applying to its author the name of 'man.' But we cannot hope to rival him in that respect. A tiger would gladly make a mouthful of a young chamois, if luck threw one in his way. But to prop up the corpse of the nursing mother in order that the hungry unweaned younglings may be lured within reach of the hunter—that is a thoroughly 'human' performance, is it not?"

"Well, call them what you will," said the Horse, "all men are not as cruel as some men. *I* know that from experience, sweet as well as bitter."

"Ah," struck in the Dog, eagerly, "then you are *not* altogether the unwilling slave of Man. You too delight, or you have delighted, as I do, in his company and service."

A light gleamed for a moment in the dim, patient eyes of the Horse, and his nostril dilated and quivered. "I did delight in it," he said proudly; "I am a thoroughbred, and great things were expected of me once. When I was two years old I carried everything before me. Yes, I have known what it is to win the admiration of thousands; and,

what is better, to be loved and cherished by a few. Women have kissed my face and plaited this ragged mane of mine in ribbons ; but that was long ago, before I broke down. My life is very different now."

" How do you live now, then ? " asked the Dog.

The Horse paused a moment before replying. " I thought you knew," he answered, with an air of simple dignity very impressive to witness. " I draw a cab."

" Great heavens ! " cried the Fox, who was perfectly well aware of the fact, in a tone of wrathful astonishment. " And you defend this race ! What black—what base ingratitude ! Your owner, I suppose, had won thousands by you, and could not spare a few pounds a year to secure a comfortable retirement for one who had done so much for him. I ask you, is there any act of meanness which——"

" Steady, steady ! " interrupted the Horse, " not so fast, please ! My owner fully intended to provide for me for life, and actually did so for a year or two, but, unfortunately for me, luck went against him on the turf, and—well, to cut a long story short, I passed to the assignees in bankruptcy. But I believe he was really sorry to part with me, and his daughter cried bitterly when she came to bid me good-bye."

" Much good that was," said the Fox contemptuously. " But, however, I am not concerned either with the cruelties of ignorant men or with the heartlessness of the luxurious and self-indulgent classes. What they may do is of little consequence. It is not their doings which have caused our friend here," glancing at the Dog, " to doubt whether he has not been mistaken in Man. It is the conduct of those who profess to be the most enlightened and humane among

their species. You know what his master is, don't you?" he continued, turning from the Dog, who was becoming painfully agitated, to the rest of the company. "He is a well-known vivisector."

"He is—he is one of the kindest and most benevolent of human beings," interrupted the Dog hastily. "He is beloved by all who know him."

"Except rabbits, I presume," interjected the Fox, drily. "How many scores do they tell me that he 'used up' in the course of last year? He must be a delightful person to live with, especially if one happened to be taken ill of some interesting disease."

"He nursed me through the distemper as a puppy," said the Dog, with feeling. "All through one night he sat up, giving me egg and port wine every two hours. I should have died if it hadn't been for him. It was only his great skill that saved me."

"Dear me! how good of him!" said the Fox. "Probably yours *was* an interesting case, then, and I have no doubt he learned much from it. He did not pull you through altogether though, it seems," and the speaker glanced significantly at one of his companion's twitching fore-legs.

"No," said the Dog quietly. "The distemper has left chorea behind it. It was impossible to save me from that."

"*How do you know that?*" asked the Fox, almost in a whisper, and eyeing the other with a devilish leer.

The Dog looked at him for a moment, with nothing save pure astonishment in his limpid hazel eyes—"What on earth do you mean?" inquired he.

"Oh, nothing," said Reynard carelessly. "If you see no

cause for suspicion it may be all right ; only a scientific man like your master might have wanted to study chorea, and so have allowed——”

“ Stop ! ” growled the Dog fiercely. “ Drop that, or you and I will fall out.”

“ Don’t lose your temper, my precious innocent,” said the Fox, sweetly. “ My suggestion seems a very reasonable one to me. I start with the assumption that your master would not scruple to vivisect you if the supply of rabbits failed.”

“ Me ! his own dog ? ” said the Dog, with a horror and contempt which checked further utterance.

“ No ! not his own dog ? ” inquired the Fox with affected surprise. “ He draws the line there, does he ? Then the greater scoundrel he to vivisect other people’s dogs. The meanest of the lost curs whom he picks up for torture has probably had some one who loved him. . . . I assume of course that he would *not* mind vivisecting other people’s dogs. Would he ? ”

The Dog returned no answer. He did not feel as sure as he would have liked to feel that his master *would* mind vivisecting other people’s dogs ; and the Fox’s criticism on that act seemed to him to throw an entirely new light upon it. Reynard perceived the impression he had made, and lost no time in following up his advantage.

“ What business have you,” he went on, “ to think only of yourself, and of your own selfish interests ? You might as well be a cat, for all that I can see. If you had been elevated as much as that humbug Man pretends to have raised you, you would think of the race at large, as he does, and not of the individual.”

"As he does?" said the Horse. "Oh, but that's all nonsense. Do you believe it?"

"Not I," replied the Fox disdainfully; "I am using Man's own cant, that is all. But our friend here swallows it all most trustfully, I feel sure, don't you? You believe that Man burns with disinterested zeal for the welfare of his race, and that he tortures Bunny and Pussy there in a spirit of pure humanity—eh?"

"I don't believe—I know it," said the Dog confidently. "I know, at any rate, that my master is incapable of inflicting pain, except with a benevolent object. I have heard him say that by the sufferings of a few he hopes to alleviate the agony of thousands."

"Oh, of course!" assented the Fox, ironically. "But thousands of whom? Dogs, cats, rabbits, horses—or men?"

"Not of men only," said the Dog, with eagerness. "We lower animals are as much interested, so Man says, in the progress of scientific research as himself; and, if we are called upon to suffer, it is for the alleviation of our own——"

"Fudge!" cried the Fox in a tone of the bitterest contempt. "Don't attempt to pass off that sickening stuff upon us. Do you suppose for a moment that men would experiment on living animals for the benefit of dogs and horses alone?"

The Dog did not suppose so for a moment, and was too honest to pretend that he did.

"Man is careful enough not to hurt his own precious skin in these investigations of his," continued the Fox.

"I beg your pardon," said the Dog quickly. "Some men have sacrificed their own lives to their experiments."

"Well, let them stick to that, then," replied the Fox, "and we won't complain of them. But *you* know well enough that that is not the usual way of it. You know that what the vivisector mostly does is to torture scores and hundreds of those wretched rabbits for no other object than to prolong the life or relieve the pains of the race of beings who shoot away Bunny's legs and leave him to die by inches in a hole. Bunny is vastly interested in that object, isn't he? Don't tell me that the men who sport and the men who torture are different classes. I know they are; but I know, too, that the men who torture pretend to be the best, and boast that mankind is gradually being raised—raised, if you please—from the level of the hunter up to their own. That, to my mind," continued the Fox, shaking his head solemnly, "is the shocking part of it. But it makes your course all the clearer for you domestic animals, as you call yourselves; and I say that a very heavy responsibility rests upon you. You have deserted your own kith and kin, and thrown in your lot with Man; and I hold that, unless you are as bad as he is, you ought to cast him off without hesitation now you have found out what he is. Yes," said the Fox, collecting his forces for a last effort; "if you find that, as he approaches what he believes to be his highest development, he becomes more hard-hearted, more treacherous and hypocritical, more destitute of ordinary fidelity to his brute comrades than he was in his lower stages—I say it is time for you to give him up as a bad job. He can't complain if you do. He boasts of having taught you the virtues, and he must expect you to judge him by his own teachings. Come, for the last time, domestic animals, will you abandon Man as unworthy of your society and service;

or, rather, will you, Dog and Horse, do so? for to you," turning to the Cat, "I know it is vain to appeal."

"Quite so," said the Cat, "and therefore you need not have waked me with your gabble. What on earth has man's unworthiness got to do with the matter? All I want to know is whether I can better myself by leaving him, and I am pretty sure I can't. Man has cream, and cold fish, and soft hearth-rugs, and delightfully padded easy chairs. I know nothing pleasanter to rub one's side against than the leg of his trousers. Sometimes, it is true, in the fine spring weather, I have rambled in the woods, before the young birds can fly, and thought it would be pleasant to live out of doors, and provide for oneself. But when the winter has set in severely, I have always been glad to get back to the fire; and for an indoors cat," he added, reflectively, "of course the winter is all the better for being severe, because then the robins are not afraid to come on the window-sill."

"Ugh!" said the Fox, turning from him with disgust to the Horse; "is there anything better to be hoped from you?"

"Not a bit," said the Horse cheerily. "I have heard nothing from you that I didn't know before. I have never had any very extravagant opinion of Man's virtues. He is rough and selfish, and loses his temper about trifles, but there is good in the fellow at bottom. I don't mind working with him, and for him, to a reasonable extent, and I certainly prefer his society—if you will excuse my frankness—to yours, or that of any other of the lower animals."

"Mean-spirited wretch!" muttered the Fox. "You a thoroughbred! However, I expected," he continued, addressing the dog, "that you would be the only one

capable of appreciating my appeal. *You see what Man is from the moral point of view, and you——”*

“And I love and reverence him,” said the Dog stoutly, “as much as ever. Who am I to judge him—I, the creature of his hand? He has made me what I am, and all I have is his. He is greater, stronger, wiser than I, and I *must* suppose him to be in all things better too. If anything done by him seems to me harsh and cruel, I will believe that it only seems so because his ways are beyond the compass of my weak mind to comprehend.”

“Whew!” whistled the Fox, in unconcealed astonishment, as the Dog and Horse walked away together. “He didn’t pick up *that* language from his scientific master, I’ll be bound. But, after all, I needn’t be surprised at his merely talking so, when they tell you the story that one of those fools actually raised his head from the operating table to lick his master’s torturing hand. That kind runs easily to religion. And to think that just when Man has succeeded in creating the religious instinct in his dog, he is losing it himself!”

Chuckles hugely at the reflection, the Fox looked round for some one to share his amusement, when his eyes fell on the features of the sleeping Cat.

“Ah!” he said to himself, after a moment’s thought, “it is convenient to be wicked, but it is a misfortune to be altogether without moral sense. Unless you understand the difference between good and evil you will miss half the joke of life.”

A NEW YEAR'S VISION.

I.

Far on the outside edge of things,
Within a measurable distance
Of those Nineteen Concentric Rings
That gird the Realm of Non-existence,

A traveller in that region sees
A sort of Purgatorial Limbo,
Where sits, each New Year's Day, at ease,
A cynic Spirit, arms a-kimbo,

With many thousand spirit-clerks,
Who enter in their shadowy ledgers,
Each with appropriate remarks,
The vows of many million pledgers.

The books are kept till twelve at night,
Then closed to further contributions,
And on the backs these words they write,
“New Year,” and “Virtuous Resolutions.”

They wrap them in a piece of sky,
And seal them up for safe deposit,
And for a twelvemonth let them lie
Locked in the Transcendental Closet.

II.

I'm told that on the thirty-first
Of every following December,
To hear those books' contents rehearsed
Is—well, is something to remember.

The Chief recites the righteous deeds
That each man's virtuous New Year's will meant ;
The clerk who made the entry reads
Statistics of the vow's fulfilment.

"Tis said—I do not vouch it true ;
It may be a malicious sally—
That on comparison, the two
Do not invariably tally.

Their difference causes, 'tis believed,
A shock to optimistic notions,
And its discovery is received
With quite a mixture of emotions.

Some spirits weep, while others muse
Like surgeons o'er experience clinic.
The Registrar's acquired the views
Of an incorrigible cynic.

And 'tis from that contempt unchecked
For all mankind, which he alleges,
That he permits me to inspect
The year's new batch of New Year's pledges.

III.

Ay ! here they are, a long array,
Close written, pages upon pages,
With countless signatures to-day
Of either sex, and all the ages.

The sick, the well, the sage, the dunce,
Of every rank and every calling ;
The sinner who has stumbled once,
The sinner who is always falling.

The gay, the grave, the dull, the bright,
The wild, the mild, the weak, the able,
The statesman on the Speaker's right,
The statesman from across the table.

The lawyers, doctors, and divines,
The will-be wise, and would-be witty ;
The man who "does a bit in mines" ;
The man who's "something in the City."

The money-lender and the heirs,
The callow youths with expectations,
The beggars and the millionaires,
The wealthy aunts, and poor relations.

Jockeys, and journalists, and cooks,
And drunkards, and excessive smokers,
Tipsters and pigeons, touts and rooks,
Play-actors, painters, bankers, brokers.

IV.

And then their resolutions ! Well !
You couldn't, had you seen, forget them.
These votaries vowing to expel
The sin that chiefly doth beset them.

Conceive the "party man" self-bound
To steer a course of moral beauty,
And grow, before the year comes round,
A backbone, and a sense of duty !

The Irish patriot pledged to curb
The tongue that runs a thought too gaily,
And "do with" one expressive verb
And three "descriptive" epithets daily !

The preacher eloquent, self-shorn
To quarter-of-an-hourly sermons !
The scientific person, sworn
To own his borrowings from the Germans !

The high financier, self-confined
To undertakings safe as churches !
The smart promoter quite resigned
To "place" no shares he wouldn't purchase !

The bad, in short, to goodness vowed,
Irascibility to meekness,
To sweet humility the proud,
To strength and honour shame and weakness.

V.

So, as I close the book, I say,

“ All earnestly though men assert you,
O moral promises-to-pay,
And I.O.U.’s from Man to Virtue,

“ I fear that when the day comes round
(That thirty-first of next December),
The audit will again be found
To be—well, something to remember.

“ Yet though, one knows, fulfilment’s scope
Can hardly equal your dimensions,
It still would be but kind to hope
That most of you, O Good Intentions,

“ Throughout the year your ground may hold,
All pressure of temptation braving,
And relatively few be sold
By contract, for infernal paving.”

THE GREAT BAXTAIRS SCANDAL.

THE advent of the year 189— was awaited with considerable interest by the literary, and with absorbing interest by the political, world. For 189—, as an easy exercise in mental arithmetic assures us, is divided from 186— by a space of exactly five-and-twenty years, and the year 186— was the year of the death of the Right Hon. James Minton Tyler, who had left the whole of his valuable diaries and correspondence to his nephew and literary executor, Mr. Knightley Standish, with strict testamentary instructions to withhold them from publication until the lapse of the period referred to. Its expiration was for many reasons eagerly looked for. In the first place, the deceased right honourable gentleman (if that be the proper order in which to arrange his various titles to respect) had throughout the greater part of a long life enjoyed unexampled opportunities of access to the *arcana* of English politics. Without being himself a great statesman, or even a statesman at all, he contrived to acquire, and for many years to retain, the confidence of several great statesmen, whose claim to that distinguished title has been as unmistakably affirmed by history as it was unhesitatingly conceded by their contemporaries. A long official career as a minister of the second rank had testified to at least his administrative capacity, and served in

some measure to explain the respect in which his judgment was evidently held by so many more eminent men. But the extent of his private and personal influence remained always something of a mystery to the last. No one quite knew why that most accomplished of modern financiers, Sir Simon Sheddle, believed in him so devoutly, and trusted him (before their little quarrel) so unreservedly ; nobody could quite understand the bluff Duke of Doncaster's apparently sincere regard for him ; and certainly no one ever quite satisfactorily traced the causes of the connection between him and that busiest of political intriguers, Lord Baxtairs. On the other hand, it is only fair to the memory of Mr. Tyler to say that his mysterious friends presented no more insoluble a problem than his enigmatic enemies. If posterity was puzzled to know why he so powerfully attracted some people, it was equally at a loss to explain why he so violently repelled others. No man so favoured by the regards of one set of famous contemporaries has ever been so heartily detested by another set ; and the hatred was on the whole so much the more extravagant of the two sentiments excited by him, that it can hardly have been the more deserved.

But whatever view might be taken, whether favourable or unfavourable, of the deceased politician's character, there could be no doubt of his being an extremely interesting figure ; or that the famous diaries, when they saw the light, would prove as interesting as the diarist. He was credited while alive with knowing all that there was to be known of what passed behind the scenes of English politics, and he was *not* credited with any such excessive amiability of disposition as might induce a man to conceal anything that he knew to

the discredit of others. His directing the postponement of the revelations for five-and-twenty years might have been supposed indeed by very innocent persons to indicate a tenderness for the feelings of the living ; but those who knew him better were much more disposed to attribute it to a just appreciation of the defencelessness of the dead.

“ You wish, uncle,” Mr. Standish had said to him while receiving his last injunctions on this head, “ to spare the susceptibilities of those whom your disclosures might wound if published in their lifetime ? ”

“ Yes,” said the sick man, with one of his queer smiles, “ and to save them the trouble of replying.”

Mr. Standish reflected for a moment. His uncle was turned seventy, but two or three of the statesmen with whom he had had intimate relations were a good many years younger.

“ Do you think,” inquired the nephew, “ that you can reckon with confidence upon all your contemporaries having departed this life before the *Memoirs* appear ? ”

“ If any of them survive,” was the reply, “ they will be very old men.”

“ And will feel less keenly on that account, you think ? ”

“ I trust so. They will at any rate remember less accurately. Even if they can rely upon their own memory, it is enough for my purpose,” added Mr. Tyler, who was now growing visibly weaker, “ that it will be distrusted by the public.”

A few hours after this interview the worthy old gentleman passed placidly away. “ All that was mortal of him,” as the phrase is, was interred with public honours, but there was some controversy among his more candid friends as to

whether this description could be properly held to include his enmities ; for these, observed one of the most candid of the friends aforesaid, were not otherwise " mortal " than in the sense of being deadly. His obsequies, however, were most numerously attended ; and many even of those political associates who were unable to pay this mark of respect to his earthly relics, showed the utmost solicitude about his literary remains. Mr. Standish, as chief mourner, occupied, as may be imagined, a place of high importance and consideration. Many were the anxious inquiries addressed to him with regard to the last hours and the last instructions of his uncle ; and as soon as the decencies of domestic grief permitted him to accept invitations, he found himself with as many dinner engagements at the houses of important political personages as the most aspiring of young men could wish for. They began to fall off a little when it became known that the deceased politician's diaries were not to see the light for a quarter of a century, but looked up again when people learned—as Mr. Standish took good care they should learn—that his uncle's papers were not bequeathed to his literary executor under seal, and consequently held no secrets from *him*. And when, a year or two later, he published his *Loose Leaves from a Minister's Note-Book*, with its piquant allusions to bygone political scandals, and its knowing hints of the " we could an if we would " order, Mr. Knightley Standish became by general assent one of the most agreeable young men to be met with in London society. Mr. Standish bore his honours discreetly and with modesty. He was not so vain, he used to protest, as to attribute his social acceptance to the brilliancy of his talk or the fascination of his manners.

Knowledge, he would go on to say, had attractions of its own ; and if his intimacy was sought and cherished by the grandes of politics, it was merely that “ he happened to be better informed than most men of his years.”

But whatever his claims to the notice of these great men, there can be no doubt of its high value to him. The position which it acquired for him, while yet a young man of three-and-twenty, as a social notability, he had, in spite of his modest disclaimer, enough wit and *aplomb* to maintain. His uncle’s death had left him, as sole legatee, in tolerably easy circumstances ; the assistance of his distinguished patrons enabled him to obtain a seat in Parliament ; and though his Parliamentary career was but a brief one, he made good use of the increased facilities which it afforded him for advancing his reputation as a man likely to be better acquainted than another with the political secrets of the hour. So esteemed and so employed, Mr. Standish lived a life of agreeable excitement and gratified vanity from youth to middle age. Still he was not sorry when, a few weeks after his forty-seventh birthday, he found himself entering upon the last twelvemonth of the period for which his uncle had directed his *Memoirs* to be withheld from the political world. For, to say the truth, the political world was beginning to lose somewhat of its earlier interest in Mr. Standish. Nearly all his uncle’s contemporaries had passed away, and the generation which succeeded them had not the same good reasons for thinking him an agreeable person. A painful suspicion at times stole over him that he was regarded, if not exactly as a “ fogey,” at least as having entered that middle-state or limbo of fogeyism proper, the inhabitants of which are known by the official

description of men “no longer young.” Add to this that Mr. Standish was not prospering in money matters. He had been left, as has been said, with a fair income, which, being a man of order and regularity, he had never exceeded by more than a hundred and fifty pounds or so per annum. Now twenty-five years of punctual adherence to this practice not only reduces a man’s invested capital, which is perhaps a minor matter, but begins to affect his personal comfort by diminishing his income; and this latter consequence Mr. Standish could not tamely submit to. Disgusted at finding himself growing poorer as he grew older, he endeavoured to make his reduced capital go further by seeking more speculative investments, and, as usually happens in such cases, he made a considerable portion of it go so far that it disappeared from his view for ever. The upshot of all which was that it was absolutely necessary for Mr. Standish to make the *Tyler Papers* a “big success”; and some twelve months before the permitted date of publication he set vigorously to work to organise victory.

The result of his first steps more than answered his expectations. The firm of publishers to whom in confidence he communicated some of the contents of his uncle’s *Memoirs* were greatly impressed with what they heard. In particular they were much struck by the light which its disclosures threw upon the secret history of the Coalition of 18—, a subject which in the then ill-defined condition of parties would be likely to arrest the special attention of the public. The private negotiations which preceded the Coalition were all fully unveiled in the *Memoirs*, and a very pretty scandal they revealed—a scandal not only compromising to some half-dozen deceased politicians, but also,

and much the most seriously, damaging to the functionally weak but not hitherto organically affected reputation of that still surviving political veteran, the Earl of Baxtairs. The publishers foresaw how revelations of this kind would make the *Memoirs* "draw"; the book, they admitted, ought to be "the book of the season"; and when Mr. Standish had, by some half-dozen sly paragraphs in the newspapers, contrived to whet public expectation to the keenest pitch, Messrs. Small, Peaker, and Co. saw their way, not indeed to concluding a definite agreement at once for the copyright of the *Memoirs*, but to "mentioning" a sum in connection therewith which made Mr. Standish's mouth water.

Lord Baxtairs, to do that venerable but infirm octogenarian justice, appeared less affected than any one else by the general excitement about the forthcoming work. Not so, however, his son, Viscount Postern, who having made his peace with his party—by whom his father had ever since the Coalition days been eyed somewhat askance—was now looking for office. Again and again did he visit the old man at Brighton, where he passed most of his time, in the hope of rousing him to a sense of the situation, and inducing him to take some action to prevent the threatened disclosures.

"What will you do, sir," his son asked, "if this rascal really has, as is more than probable, a whole budget of unpleasant secrets, and shoots them all out before the public?"

"Do, my dear Postern," replied the aged earl drily—"do? Why, 'live it down,' to be sure."

"Live it down, sir? At eighty!"

"What? You don't give me nine days then?" was the

old peer's chuckling retort ; and Lord Postern sighed to think how hopelessly the veteran had failed to keep abreast of the progress of public virtue.

" If we only knew what the fellow's facts are," the son would say impatiently, " we should at least know what we had to expect. Can you not recall the exact circumstances, sir ! "

" Now, Postern, now, my dear boy," said his father deprecatingly ; " a job of nearly fifty years ago ! Now really, really ! "

Lord Postern sighed again. He felt the justice of the protest, and that he might as well expect his father to recall all the *menus* of his dinners.

" Will you," he said, as a last resort, " will you empower Mr. Dockett to overhaul your papers, and see if he can find copies of the correspondence which passed between you and Mr. Tyler at the time in question ? "

" Yes," said the old man, with a sly smile. " Mr. Dockett is a model private secretary, indefatigable in research, and he may see what he can find."

Further fortified by express authority from the earl, obtained in answer to a letter addressed to him at Brighton by the private secretary himself, Mr. Dockett set to work, and spent three months of almost incessant labour in collecting, arranging, collating, and, in many instances, taking copies of the documents which had accumulated in thousands during a long and busy life. But no Baxtairs-Tyler Correspondence, no scandals, indeed, of any kind—nothing even interesting. Lord Baxtairs might have been a precisian of the straitest sect of political Phariseeism for all that appeared in his papers.

At this juncture the old earl died ; and the day after his funeral the private secretary made a proposal to his successor at which the latter opened his eyes.

Mr. Dockett then explained himself more fully.

“ But—but—” said the new Lord Baxtairs, “ no publisher would——”

“ Leave that to me,” said Mr. Dockett. “ Have I your authority to negotiate with Mr. Standish ? ” He received it, and in an hour’s time presented himself at that gentleman’s chambers at the Albany.

Mr. Standish had a slight acquaintance with him, as he had with most private secretaries of official or ex-official personages, and was naturally at no loss to guess the nature of his business. As naturally, therefore, he welcomed him with an air of profound, though polite, surprise.

“ Good morning, Mr. Standish,” said his visitor, who was no less naturally prepared for this kind of reception, and knew the advantage of going straight to the point. “ You have no doubt guessed what brings me here.”

Mr. Standish executed a diplomatic bow, which might mean anything.

“ Lord Baxtairs’ attention has been called to the newspaper paragraphs respecting the approaching publication of your late uncle’s diaries, and has commissioned me to confer with you on the subject.”

Silence still appearing to Mr. Standish to be more prudent than speech, he bowed again.

“ I am going to talk quite frankly with you, Mr. Standish,” proceeded Mr. Dockett—“ though indeed,” he added, “ I can make no merit of that in the peculiar circumstances of the case. All the world knows, of course, that one great

attraction—perhaps *the* great attraction of the forthcoming *Memoirs*—is the light which they are expected to throw on the secret history of the Coalition of 18—. Most people were aware that Mr. Tyler had a considerable share in the negotiations which preceded that extremely unexpected political combination ; but what they are *not* aware of,” proceeded Mr. Dockett, with a still more pronounced assumption of friendly confidence, “is the part played in the affair by a member of the then Cabinet, and a colleague of the Prime Minister whom he was destined to supersede as chief of the administration which followed—in a word, by the late Lord Baxtairs.”

Mr. Dockett paused for a moment, but Mr. Standish said nothing.

“The correspondence—the very private correspondence—which passed at the time between these two eminent men is—or so we have reason to fear—about to see the light. May I ask if it is so ?”

He paused again, and for so long this time that Mr. Standish was obliged to answer.

“It *is* my intention,” he said, “to publish the letters exchanged on that occasion between the late Lord Baxtairs and Mr. Minton Tyler.”

“I am extremely obliged to you for your candour,” said Mr. Dockett, sweetly. “I need not, I am sure, inform any one so familiar with the history of that time, that the publication of that correspondence is gravely deprecated by the present Lord Baxtairs. The position in which his father was placed during the crisis in question was one of extreme difficulty ; the conflict between the claims of public duty and those of private friendship was terribly severe. The former,

we know, prevailed in the end ; and history, I think, has justified their triumph. But you can well understand the desire both of Lord Baxtairs and his successor that the record of that conflict should be buried in oblivion. During the fortnight or so of its duration, the perplexed minister was necessarily —was inevitably—compelled to maintain an attitude which would now be open to misconstruction, and might, perhaps, even be deemed—well—a—I will say, inconsistent with due loyalty to his colleagues. In a word, Mr. Standish, we feel that the publication of these letters, which moreover were written under the strictest seal of confidence, would do serious damage to the political reputation of the late earl, if not gravely compromise the political prospect of his successor."

"Mr. Dockett," said his companion cheerfully, "I should ill return the candour with which you have treated me, were I to conceal the fact that I entirely agree with you. I fully expect that the publication of the correspondence will have both the results which you apprehend, and I assure you that the task of preparing it for the press, with this conviction ever present to my mind, has been the most painful part of my responsibilities as an editor."

"I am anxious, if possible, to relieve you of it," said Mr. Dockett, drily. "Lord Baxtairs has instructed me to ask you whether you cannot reconcile it with your editorial duty to withhold these letters from publication."

Mr. Standish felt that it was time to throw off the private individual and assume the public servant.

"Impossible, Mr. Dockett," he replied firmly ; "I am sorry to say it, but it is impossible. My duty, not only to my uncle, but, as I conceive, to my country, compels me to give these documents to the world."

"Lord Baxtairs, Mr. Standish, owes a duty to his father ; and so far as the public are concerned, I must say I think that *their* paramount interest is in the maintenance of those obligations of good faith and honour, as between public men, which alone render it possible for them to serve their country with advantage."

"I cannot undertake to discuss that point with you," said Mr. Standish, stiffly. "Every man has a right to his own view of what the public interest requires ; but he must expect others to act upon theirs. I have long and anxiously considered the question, and the resolution I have come to you must please consider final."

There was a pause ; and Mr. Dockett then, in a sensibly colder tone, resumed,—

"I am sorry the matter cannot be settled amicably. As it is, you will force us to take other means."

"Oh, indeed ! Legal ?"

"No, not legal ; though you are aware, of course, that Lord Baxtairs could restrain you by injunction from publishing any of his father's letters. He was at first disposed to take this course, but I dissuaded him from it."

At this Mr. Standish rose from his chair, walked to the fire, and turning his back to it laughed outright.

"By Jove, Mr. Dockett," he said, "you did me an ill turn there."

"I know I did," replied the other, calmly. "I don't know why you should think I want to do you a good one. I quite understand that an injunction was just the thing you wanted. We couldn't prevent your publishing the facts without the letters, and our suppressing the letters would convince everybody that your account of the facts was the

true one. How, indeed, could we expect any contradiction of ours to be believed, when we were burking the evidence which, if our story were true, would have established it? And meanwhile the mere incident of the litigation would have probably trebled the circulation of your book."

"You deal with the subject like a master," said Mr. Standish, gaily; "but since you admit yourselves unable to suppress these letters by any action of your own, and since I distinctly decline to oblige you by suppressing them myself, will you kindly inform me what you propose to do?"

"I will," said Mr. Dockett, and there was such an unmistakable twinkle of triumph in his eye that Mr. Standish came back to the table and sat down again. "I will," repeated Mr. Dockett. "*We shall immediately publish the correspondence ourselves.*"

The announcement was so wholly unexpected that Mr. Standish half rose from his chair at the shock, but instantly recovered and reseated himself. If the threat was serious it was a formidable one, for there were still nine months to elapse before his own liberty of publication arose. But he had recovered his outward composure before he replied,—

"Your threat, my dear Mr. Dockett, would appear to argue a somewhat extensive unfamiliarity with what you are talking about. Lord Baxtairs cannot be aware of what his father's letters contain."

"On the contrary, we are perfectly well acquainted with their contents."

"Then may I ask with what object Lord Baxtairs proposes to compel his distinguished father to write himself down—well, something worse than an ass?"

It was now Mr. Dockett's turn to laugh.

"You are much too shrewd, I take it, Mr. Standish, not to perceive that for yourself. In the first place, we shall have the advantage of telling our own story, editing and annotating our own letters ; and shall then, of course, make out the best case we can for his late lordship. If you dispute the glosses which we put on the letters, we shall reply to you ; but whether you do or not, we shall take good care that the public is heartily sick of the whole matter before your book comes out. In the second, and as I think the more important place, by anticipating your disclosures we shall have at least the satisfaction of annihilating the prospective profits of a gross breach of confidence. Even supposing we fail to whitewash Lord Baxtairs successfully, he will be none the worse off than if we had waited for you to blacken him. Nine months hence his reputation may be exactly where it would have been, but what will have become of your market ? "

" You seem to forget, Mr. Dockett," said Standish, " that the Baxtairs-Tyler correspondence will not be the only interesting chapter in my uncle's book."

" Nor will it be in ours," retorted Mr. Dockett, briskly. " Lord Baxtairs' memoirs, now ready for the press, extend over a period of fifty years, during nearly two-thirds of which time your uncle and he were in constant intercourse with the same public men, and engaged in the observation of the same political events. I imagine," concluded Mr. Dockett, carelessly, " that the two books will cover almost identical ground."

The last hint, intended to stagger Mr. Standish, had the effect of reassuring him. He had never heard of any such memoirs, though as Lord Baxtairs, the last surviving contem-

porary of his uncle, had for some years been the only man left alive who could possibly forestall the Tyler Papers, he had naturally made many inquiries on the subject. Never having heard of any such memoirs, he was strongly disposed to doubt their existence. Doubting it, he was easily led to doubt the seriousness of Mr. Dockett's threat. At any rate it seemed his game to wait.

"Well, Mr. Dockett," he said, rising from his chair and looking at the clock, "unless you have anything more to say, I don't know why we should take up each other's time any longer. Of course I have no power to prevent, nor even any right to object to, Lord Baxtairs taking the step he proposes. He must act as he is advised. Good morning."

So ended the interview; but in spite of Mr. Standish's determination to defy his visitor's threats, he was not quite comfortable in his mind. And his uneasiness was considerably deepened by an announcement which met his eye a morning or two after, on opening his newspaper, under the advertisement-heading of "Messrs. Primmer and Burjoyce's New Publications." Short, but expressive, it ran as follows:—

[*Nearly ready.*]

Fifty Years of Political Life : being a Selection from the
Journals and Correspondence of the late Right Hon.
the Earl of Baxtairs, G.C.B. 2 vols. 8vo.

Unwilling as he was to do so, Mr. Standish was forced to admit that this looked like business. A respectable firm of publishers would hardly be likely to stultify themselves by advertising as "nearly ready" any work which they had not either actually seen in manuscript, or of the existence of which they had not good reason to be convinced. Still—still—it was

all very strange ; he could not bring himself to think that—in short, he was in that state of indecision and perplexity which renders action of any kind impossible. Not long, however, was he allowed to remain in it. His breakfast was spoilt for him a day or two after by a civil but sternly business-like letter from Messrs. Small, Peaker, and Co., pointing out to him that the announcement of Lord Baxtairs' memoirs for almost immediate appearance materially altered the conditions under which they were negotiating for the publication of the Tyler Papers, and that if, as was to be feared, the revelations of the more recently deceased statesman were found to anticipate those of his old political associate, Messrs. S. P. and Co. would necessarily be compelled to reconsider the offer which they had previously stated their willingness to make Mr. Standish for the copyright of his book.

Mr. Standish flung down the letter on the breakfast-table with an ejaculation of extreme disgust. He felt that his adversary had, at any rate, won the first game. But a long course of industrious self-seeking had accustomed him to subject even nobler passions than that of anger to the restraints of material interest.

“There is nothing for it,” he said, after an hour’s steady reflection on the situation—“there is nothing for it but compromise.” And, sitting down at his writing-table, he hastily penned a note to Mr. Dockett, requesting the favour of a visit from him in the course of the afternoon.

The private secretary appeared at the appointed time, not indecently, but still quite perceptibly, triumphant. But Mr. Standish’s business instincts were now supreme ; and if his visitor had executed a war-dance round his room, and

taunted him as a Red Indian taunts a captured enemy, he would have borne it with perfect equanimity.

"Mr. Dockett," he said at once, "I feel that it is for me to make the first advances on this occasion. I will begin, then, by admitting that so far you have got the best of it. I didn't believe in the existence of your Baxtairs' Memoirs when you called upon me last week. I do now—or, at any rate, I don't think it safe to reckon on their non-existence. They may, for all I know, be 'nearly ready' for publication ; and if you were to publish them now, I frankly confess that it would knock the bottom out of my uncle's book. But that brings me to the point : and it can be very easily and shortly stated. We are both of us preparing to publish a couple of volumes of political scandal : I, to put the matter plainly, with a view to pecuniary profit ; you, to put it equally plainly, with a view to the spoiling my market for purposes of your own. It is clearly essential to my object to be first in the field ; while, assuming that your purposes can be otherwise accomplished, it is as clearly *not* essential to yours. Given a reasonable satisfaction of your demands in the matter of the Baxtairs-Tyler correspondence, I presume you would be willing to let my book appear first. Now what would you consider a reasonable satisfaction of these demands ?"

"What do you offer as such ?"

"H—m ! Well, you can't expect me to suppress the correspondence altogether—the spiciest thing in the book ! That would be too much."

"Those are Lord Baxtairs' terms, however."

"Then he will have to abate them," said Mr. Standish, stoutly. "The letters must and shall appear."

"They are Lord Baxtairs' terms," repeated Mr. Dockett with deliberation ; "but I will—entirely on my own responsibility, mind—I will make a proposal which, if you accept it, I pledge myself to use my best endeavours to induce Lord Baxtairs to accept likewise. It is this : that within a week from to-day you submit to us the proof-sheets of the chapter or chapters of your uncle's *Memoirs* containing the Baxtairs-Tyler correspondence. These proof-sheets we are to be at liberty to revise, correct, expurgate, annotate, supplement, and 'edit' generally, in any way and to any extent we please. They are then to be returned to you, and in the event of your accepting our emendations, elisions, additions, etc., as they stand, and pledging your honour to us to publish the chapters exactly in the form in which we return them to you, we on our part will undertake to delay the publication of our memoirs until after yours have appeared."

"And supposing I decline to accept your emendations ! What then ?"

"What then ? The *status quo*. It will be simply a case of 'as you were.' We resume our right to publish the letters in our own way at once, you resume your right to publish them in your own way hereafter."

The offer seemed a fair one ; and, sincere or not, it seemed an offer which there could be no risk in experimentally accepting. Above all, it promised the invaluable gain of time. Standish asked for a night to consider it, and wrote the next day to Mr. Dockett accepting it, with, of course, full reservation of the liberty of action in case the proposed compromise fell through. The MS. of the Tyler Papers had not yet gone, he said, to the printers, but he

would request his publishers to have the important chapter set up, and the proofs should be in Mr. Dockett's hands in a week.

The private secretary glanced through the letter, and handed it with an air of quiet exultation to Lord Baxtairs.

"We shall get 'discovery of documents' now," he said.

"Yes," replied his patron, though with considerably less complacency of manner. "You have certainly managed the affair with remarkable address. The completeness of your victory is undeniable. All I am in doubt about is its value."

"Information is always valuable, Lord Baxtairs, and in this case it was indispensable. When we see the letters we shall at least be able to ascertain what prospect there is of our being able to 'edit' them into fitness for publication, or whether we are really driven to the desperate remedy of an injunction. I still hope and believe that the former course will be found practicable."

The earl shook his head doubtfully; he imagined that he knew his father better than Mr. Dockett did.

The week wore on, but before the proof-sheets became due a discovery took place which transformed the whole situation. Lord Baxtairs came hurrying into Mr. Dockett's room one morning with an excited air, and a sealed packet in his hand. A glance at it was enough to tell the secretary that it was many years old, and he was about to inquire whether it was really what they were in search of, when Lord Baxtairs handed him a letter which had been attached to it. This letter, which was itself dated some twenty years back, was in the late earl's handwriting, and addressed to

his son and successor. It was to inform him that the packet contained documents of a peculiarly private character, which his son, if indeed he did not think fit to destroy them altogether, would on reading them, at once, see the expediency of guarding from any other eyes than his own.

"I have no doubt they are the letters we want," said Lord Baxtairs, placing the packet in Mr. Dockett's hand.

"Do you intrust me with these—do you authorise me to inspect—to read them?" asked Mr. Dockett, with rather a curious eagerness.

"Of course, of course," replied Lord Baxtairs, with some surprise; "you have had the whole conduct of the business hitherto, and you may as well see it out."

Mr. Dockett opened the packet and glanced rapidly at its contents, which exactly answered to his expectations. It was indeed the long-sought Baxtairs-Tyler correspondence.

"Stop," said Mr. Dockett; "the first thing is 'to declare off' with Standish. He has now nothing to sell us."

And he hastily dashed off a letter to Mr. Standish, expressing his extreme regret that Lord Baxtairs, after several days' consideration, had declined to ratify the provisional agreement into which the secretary had entered. Consequently he would not trouble Mr. Standish to forward the proof-sheets, and both parties might consider the matter as having reverted to the *status quo*.

Mr. Dockett spent the whole of that day and far into the night in reading, arranging, and, for the purposes of more convenient reference, copying the papers which had been placed in his hands, and which, in point of fact, contained, besides the Baxtairs-Tyler correspondence, a whole mass of curious and interesting matter, including the record of

several other old political jobs of the most flagrant and fragrant description.

The next day the secretary submitted to Lord Baxtairs the letters which he had been arranging. His lordship read them through with a lowering brow. They were far more damning than even he had expected. He laid the last of them on the table and looked at Mr. Dockett.

"There is only one thing for it," he said. "'Editing' them is hopeless."

"Hopeless!" assented Mr. Dockett, emphatically. "You might as well try to edit Lord Chesterfield's letters into a religious treatise. There is, as you say, only one thing for it."

"An injunction?"

"Yes. It will have a bad effect, of course; but anything, Lord Baxtairs—*anything* would be better than allowing these letters to be published." To which Lord Baxtairs ruefully agreed.

Mr. Standish, meanwhile, had of course been somewhat disconcerted by Mr. Dockett's letter, but he could do nothing, and as days and weeks passed without the rival publication appearing, his spirits began to revive.

"If the fools put it off too long," he thought, "they will improve instead of injuring my market."

A quarter of a year—a half year slipped away; it was now but three months from the important day, and the "book season" was about to begin. Mr. Standish's publishers plucked up courage and advertised the Tyler Papers.

In three days an injunction was obtained by Lord Baxtairs to restrain them from publishing any letters addressed by his father to the late Right Hon. James Minton Tyler.

Mr. Standish rubbed his hands.

"The idiots are playing my game," he chuckled. "However, I may as well keep back their book, too, for the present. It will increase the public interest in the affair." And he accordingly applied for and obtained an injunction to restrain the publishers of a certain book, entitled *Fifty Years of Political Life*, from publishing any letters addressed by the late Right Hon. James Minton Tyler to the late Right Hon. the Earl of Baxtairs, G.C.B.

"They little think," laughed the present earl, on hearing of the proceedings, "that there is no such book in existence."

"No," said Mr. Dockett demurely, "they little think so." And the business being settled, and he not being the private secretary of the new peer, bade Lord Baxtairs a deferential, and received from him a friendly, adieu.

Two days after, Mr. Standish was startled by a significant change in the publishers' advertisement of *Fifty Years of Political Life*. In place of the words "nearly ready," at the head of the announcement, it bore the legend "next week," while to its tail was appended the words, "Edited by Sidney Dockett, M.A., for ten years private secretary to the late earl." So they *had* got three months' start of him. But were the letters really there?

They were, every one of them : together with an ingenious summary, sailing as near the wind of the second injunction as possible, of Mr. Minton Tyler's replies. Never was such a scandal unveiled ; the volumes sold like hot rolls.

Upon Lord Baxtairs, who had not noticed the change in the advertisement, the book fell like a thunderbolt. He instantly wrote an indignant letter to the publishers, and received from them a still more indignant reply. The greater part of the MS. had, they said, been placed in their

hands fully six months before by Mr. Dockett, who had at the same time amply satisfied them of his editorial authority.

Lord Baxtairs then wrote a furious letter to Mr. Dockett, and received from him a Christian reply. He had acted, he said, as far as his imperfect lights directed him, "for the best"; and as for his lordship's threats of proceedings—civil and criminal—the enclosed letter (copy of an original which Lord Baxtairs might see if he wished) was a sufficient reply to *them*.

The letter ran as follows :—

" DEAR MR. DOCKETT,—

BRIGHTON, Jan. 189—

" You have my full permission to prepare a memoir of my political career, and to use for that purpose whatever documents my son and successor allows you to inspect.

" Faithfully yours,

" BAXTAIRS.

" P.S.—Do not mention this to Lord Postern. I prefer to tell him myself."

The letter fell from its reader's hands. He could almost hear the old man's chuckle at the double mystification, of appointing a biographer without the knowledge of his son, and, without the knowledge of the biographer, authorising the son to withhold from him all really valuable material. The venerable jester had, however, overreached himself here, and the son felt that he was powerless in the matter.

And so the lawyers, whom he consulted, told him.

Mr. Standish's agreement with his publishers fell through.

Mr. Dockett's book was the "book of the season."

THE PASSING OF THE AGED PSYCHOPATH.

In Russia, where obscure and imaginary mental ailments are, for all legal and most practical purposes, confounded with insanity of behaviour, the word *psychopath*,—meaning a person who enjoys all the rights of a sane man, and many of the privileges of a lunatic,—though coined but a few years ago, is most extensively used by all classes of society. So many persons now describe themselves as *psychopaths* that it no longer confers upon them the least distinction.—LANIN.

COME hither, little Vladimir,
And listen and take heed ;
I've sent for you that you may hear
Your grandsire's dying rede.

I ever sought distinction's niche
Throughout my life, and you,
My Vladimir Ivanovitch,
Must be distinguished too.

Then take not up, O grandson mine,—
Or dread my ghostly wrath,—
So common and so cheap a line
As that of psychopath.

For you must shun the vulgar herd ;
And nowadays, my lad,

To name yourself by such a word
Would stamp you as a cad.

Far otherwise it was with me,
Thank Heaven ! when I was young,
And my well-marked psychopathy
Employed the public tongue.

When, as a child, in childish play
I chanced to break a limb,
And got my tutor sent away
By charging it on him ;

All deemed my case with interest fraught,
Whom thus, ere yet a youth,
A nervous system highly-wrought
Forbade to speak the truth.

In like emotion, too, they joined
When, in my boyhood's spring,
I irresponsibly purloined
My father's diamond ring.

Then as my morbid instincts thrrove,
And paralysed my will,
Men's curiosity inwove
A stronger feeling still.

And awe and wonder were complete
When, with no purposed aim,
I was impelled to counterfeit
My uncle's honoured name.

Why dwell upon the homicides
And criminal assaults
For which psychopathy provides
Excuse as venial faults ?

Suffice it that a case so rare
Through mouths of mortals ran,
Till I was reckoned everywhere
A most distinguished man.

But now, alas ! the psychopath
Is everywhere on view—
Ah, boy, avert my ghostly wrath,
And shun the common crew !

Ascribe your thefts to simple greed,
Plead hatred when you slay,
Account for every wicked deed
In the old-fashioned way.

To shame these imitative times
The novel sight present
Of one who perpetrates his crimes
With criminal intent.

And ever this distinction proud
To psychopaths oppose,
That you, unlike that vulgar crowd,
Could help it if you chose.

THE ARMOURER OF THE TWENTIETH LEGION.

THE armourer of the Twentieth Legion lay dying at Aquæ Sulis, of gout in the stomach. At his bedside, stylus and tablets in hand, sat the eminent local physician Haustus Blupilius Niger, whom the solicitude of the sick man's comrades had substituted for the regimental surgeon.

Julius Vitalis unclosed his glazing eye, and cast a feebly wistful look at his companion.

"Are you writing another prescription?" he asked, in a faint whisper.

"No, my friend," replied Niger, quietly. "I am writing an account of the case for a medical colleague of mine in Rome, who is interested in the prosperity of this place. Aquæ Sulis is falling off in popularity as a health resort, and that, considering the large and recent outlay upon the new baths, is a serious matter."

"You think there is hope, then?" inquired Vitalis, with a momentary gleam of light under his shaggy eyebrows.

"For Aquæ Sulis? Certainly. Its decline has but just commenced, and can easily be—"

"No, no! for me! for me!" said Vitalis, impatiently.

"I thought I had explained to you," said the doctor, with a touch of irritation, "that your case is hopeless, quite hopeless."

"And yet you think it will revive public faith in the cura-

tive properties of the waters," said the armourer, sinking back on his *grabatus*.

"In the way I am stating it," replied Niger, with a smile, "I believe it will. I never saw any podagric attack show such signs of yielding to the *douche*; but, of course, if you will drink that detestable British mead instead of the sound Falernian I ordered you, and which you might have got regularly and *most* reasonably, as I told you, from my friend Nobilius Pauper, of 101, Suburra, why, you must take the consequences."

Vitalis closed his eyes with a sigh, and remained silent for a few moments.

"I should have liked," he then said, gruffly, "to end my days in Rome. It is hard, after twenty years in the service, to leave my ashes in this accursed isle."

"Armourer," said the physician, rising to his feet with a deeply offended air, "you forget that you are addressing a Roman citizen, whose family have been settled in this accursed isle, and even in this God-forsaken town," he added with still more elaborate irony, "for a hundred and fifty years. I have every intention of leaving my own ashes here, if indeed they may be thought worthy to repose beside those of your honour's worship."

"I would rather lay mine by my mother's, in the Appian Way," said Julius, doggedly, "at least if I am to die in this fashion, like a stricken crone, rather than a soldier," and as the thought surged up in his mind he struck the frame of his pallet fiercely with his clenched hand.

"Have you any messages for friends in Rome?" inquired the matter-of-fact physician, as he put away his tablets and rose to depart.

The dying man feebly shook his head. "Any message that I have," he muttered, "they must come here to read. I have given you the inscription for my *cippus* already. You will see, will you not, that it is cut by a decent lapidary?"

"I have already provided for that," said Niger kindly; and then, as though to escape his friend's thanks for his affectionate promptitude, moved quickly towards the door. "I sup with Pulcherius," he said, as he paused a moment at the door, "but I will look in again before midnight to see how it fares with you."

II.

The villa of the wealthy and elegant Pulcherius Paullus stood on the gentle eminence which we now know as Bathwick Hill, a spot which commands a striking view of the Queen of the West, and which even in the fourth century A.D. looked down upon a flourishing Roman settlement and important military station.

Pulcherius was a learned antiquarian and munificent patron of the arts, who delighted in gathering round him whatever notabilities, scientific, artistic, or literary, were to be found, from time to time, either among the Roman residents in Britain or the casual visitors to the island.

In his spacious supper-chamber there were this evening assembled a small but distinguished party, consisting of a highly fashionable young poet of a refined and melancholy aspect, Nimnimius Heliotropus by name; another bard of a more fiery and Tyrtæan order in the person of Jingonius Minax; the well-known numismatist and accomplished decipherer of inscriptions, Aridulus Pulvis; a gentleman interested in an important staple of Romano-British commerce, who had made the patronymic of Edulius Molluscus

a name to conjure with on the Kentish coast ; and last, but not least, the caustic Aduncus Naso, the cynical tenor of whose philosophic works had rendered him an object less of admiration than of somewhat irritated curiosity among his fellow-residents in Britain.

As Niger entered the supper-chamber and exchanged greetings with his host, he caught the name of the patient whose bedside he had just left.

"He is a fine fellow," said Molluscus, "one of the old breed of soldiers, who have done so much to carry the Roman eagles, and—ahem!—extend the civilising agencies of Roman trade, to so many distant regions of the world. It is a thousand pities that Fate should have forbidden the gallant old warrior to lay his ashes in the mother city he has served so long and well."

"You are right, indeed," said their host, with a sigh. "Minax, let us listen to your stirring lines again. Our friend the physician would doubtless like to hear them."

In the earlier and simpler ages of the Christian era, a poet required less pressing than is necessary in these days to induce him to recite his own compositions. Minax cleared his melodious throat, and with a side glance at Heliotropus, who appeared wrapt in contemplation, he thus began :—

" Nay, lay them by me,—spear and sword,
True-tried on many a stricken field.
Bethink you that the arms I wield
Owned me their smith before their lord ?

" My keen craft whetted them for strife,
To reap the foe like ripened corn ;
Of my own life and strength was born
The strength of steel that hedged my life.

"Forge blazed and hammer swung, to store
 The fury and the force that broke
 · Forthright and downward in that stroke
 My failing arm shall strike no more.

"Is this soft city of the West,
 This lazarus-house among the hills,
 This couch of weakling aches and ills,
 Fit for a legionary's rest ?

"No ! if this land must build my pile,
 If the Dark God denies me Rome,
 And calls me to my shadowy home
 Here, on this far barbarian isle,

"Why came not, on some battle-day,
 Such summons as the soldier hears,
 Joyous, amid the shock of spears,
 The clash and clamour of the fray ?

"My sire, with many a comrade brave,
 Fell, fighting amid Dacian snows ;
 The cohorts of camp-follower crows
 Served them for mourners,—and for graves.

"And better had such death been mine
 There, on the rugged Northern plain,
 Where the wild tribesmen storm in vain
 The rampart of the Roman line !

"Ay ! better dead and derelict,
 And food for wolves on Hadrian's Mound,
 Leg-locked, breast-grappling, arm-enwound,
 In death-grip with the naked Pict."

These stanzas of Minax were warmly applauded, a circumstance which (for it was only the fourth century A.D.) appeared to give Heliotropus some uneasiness. For a while he seemed anxious to lead the conversation into a particular channel, towards which the other guests, or at any rate

Minax, showed a certain unwillingness to follow it. They apparently preferred to let Aridulus Pulvis fix the subject of chat, and discussed coins with animation for some considerable time.

Pulvis produced what he declared to be an ancient British coin of Cunobelinus, not represented in Pulcherius's collection, who (as was too common in those early times) expressed polite doubt of its authenticity. Aduncus Naso sided with Pulcherius, and remarked upon the extreme uncertainty attaching to the genuineness of most coins of over two hundred years old. Their own money of to-day—ay, and their own monuments, too—would in a few centuries gather as much doubt around them as attached, he added, suddenly extinguishing the smile on Pulcherius's face, “to nearly the whole of our amiable host's collection.” When the time came for the evacuation of Britain——

But he was here interrupted by a general outcry. In the name of civilisation, commerce, and his investments, Molluscus protested against the ill-omened words. Pulcherius glanced around him at his art-treasures, and smiled at the monstrosity of the notion that a Society so distinguished for refinement should pass away and leave no trace behind it. The archæologist, who intended to bequeath his British treasures to a Roman museum, was less concerned with the possibility of the loss of the island than with the date of the event. Minax was too shocked to speak, and from the expression of his countenance was already meditating a poem, in the fire of whose patriotic indignation the recreant Naso should be withered up. Here, however, Nimnimius had the advantage of his fellow-bard. He had his poem ready, pat to the very subject,—to which, indeed, he had

been trying to bring round the conversation,—and he seized his opportunity at once.

"Naso is right," he exclaimed, at the first momentary lull of tongues. "We are bound to look forward to the contingency to which he refers. Speaking for myself, I would say that we ought even to wish for its speedy arrival. And in this connection I will, with your permission, recite a short poem which I have composed on the point."

The company was too taken aback to protest at once, and Heliotropus was too experienced a reciter to give them time to think. He whipped out his MS. and at once began—

" Mother of nations, who hast borne on high,
 Age after age, in thy untiring hand,
 The tameless eagles of the might of Rome,
 The bounden *fasces* of her wise command,
 To climes beneath the Orient's glowing dome
 And Britain's misty sky,
 The hour has come to grant thy subject globe
 The liberation of its lord's retreat,
 And once more gather round thy pausing feet
 The far-thrown skirts of thy Imperial robe.

" The world is ripe for freedom ; manumit :
 The world is young, and thou hast waxen old ;
 The orb of empire trembles in thy grasp ;
 Thy song is sung ; thy mighty tale is told ;
 The book is filled for Fate to close and clasp,
 And fix her seal on it.
 Accomplished is the work Jove's counsel willed ;
 That destiny the Sibyl saw and sang
 To old Æneas, long ere Victory sprang
 Armed from the brain of Cæsar, is fulfilled.

" For never have the immortal gods ordained
 Perpetual rule by their august decree
 To any state by hands of mortal reared,

And let it be enough, O Rome, for thee,
That not unloved by some, by none unfear'd,
Thou hast subdued and reign'd.
Stand now apart, self-gather'd, and rejoice
In those strong children who from East to West
Have sucked the milk of wisdom from thy breast,
And learnt the speech of nations from thy voicc."

Heliotropus' little poem was received in a chilly silence, which Pulcherius was the first to break.

"Your lines, my dear young friend," he said, with a touch of paternal satire, "would have as much sense as elegance, were it not for two assumptions which constitute, so far as I can see, though I am no poet, the whole point and pith of them."

"And which are?" inquired Nimnimius, with the tolerant smile of cultured youth at the prejudices of Philistine middle age.

"And which are," continued Pulcherius, "first, that Rome has entered on the period of her decadence; and secondly, that her subject provinces are anywhere capable of maintaining an independent existence after the withdrawal of her supporting hand. As to the former assumption, it is refuted by evidences of every kind. We have the best reason, I thank the gods, for believing that the Empire is stronger than it ever was, and that when the barbarians on our frontier have received a few more lessons, we shall have no further trouble with them. As to our outlying possessions, I will be content to take the case of the province in which we live, and to ask you, as a reasonable man, what possible future Britain would have to look forward to if the Roman eagles and the Roman *fusces*, of which you have sung so prettily, were to be withdrawn."

A murmur of approval followed this posing question, and grew louder when it was observed that *Heliotropus* was rummaging among his papers in apparent search of a poetic reply to it.

Naso, after that incomprehensible manner of his, was loudest in his expressions of assent.

"You are undoubtedly right, *Pulcherius*," said he ; "there is every reason to believe that the Roman Empire is immortal. Otherwise, what would become of the trade in oysters."

"Exactly," said *Edulius*, eagerly, though with a glance not unmingled with suspicion at *Naso*.

"Art and science would perish in this country," observed *Aridulus*, "without hope of revival."

"The very remark I was about to make!" added *Naso*.

"In short," continued *Pulcherius*, "every step which has been made by civilisation since the day when Julius came pearl-hunting to the coast of——"

"Pardon me," exclaimed *Pulvis* ; "for 'pearl' read 'tin.' That any intelligent man should believe that idle story of *Suetonius* about——"

"What?" cried *Pulcherius*, testily, for this was a point on which he was particularly touchy. "I thought I had convinced you that the belief in the existence of a pearl-fishery on this coast was held by our ancestors from the earliest times."

"Praised be the gods!" murmured *Naso*, to himself ; "ancient faith has not yet taken flight from the earth. I have lived to hear one archæologist declare his belief that he has convinced another."

Molluscus, who had been growing very uneasy during this controversy, now craved leave to speak.

"I believe," he said, "that Pulcherius is not far wrong in his account of the invasion of Britain. But if you want to hear the exact truth of the matter, listen."

And before his audience could turn the conversation in self-defence, he had plunged, in a rough, sonorous voice, into the recital of the following lines :—

"Weary, war-worn, wrapt in deepest study,
Doubting Cæsar sits with visage stern ;
Eyes that peer across the wine-cup ruddy,
Out upon the sea no light discern ;
Britain, through her mists
Beckoning, he resists ;
Rome and Rome's contentions cry, "Return."

"Idle lounged the legionary ; idle
Rode the galley at the harbour gate,
Fretting in fair winds its hawser-bridle,
Straining for the spring across the strait,
While its master sat,
Now this way, now that,
Swift his mind dividing in debate.

"While he sat and sipped the ruby fluid,
Brought a slave a bark-strip smooth and thin,
Bearing legend, 'Dandorix the Druid'
Audience seeks most earnestly to win.'
Cæsar at the 'card'
Gazed a moment, hard,
Then gave order, 'Show the stranger in.'

"Entered then a priest of reverend presence,
Carrying a small, mysterious keg,
Made before the conqueror proud obeisance,
Bowing head, but bending not the leg,
Even as who should say,
'Though I sue to-day,
Yet command I oftener than I beg.'

“ ‘ Ask me not,’ began this aged person,
 ‘ Why my offerings, my advice I bring.
 ‘ Tis enough that I have laid my curse on
 That detested country whence I spring,
 And to see it thrust
 Prostrate in the dust
 Would delight me more than anything.

“ ‘ Wherefore, then, delay thy swoop on Britain,
 Eagle of the nations ? Nay, but haste,
 Treasures undiscovered and unwritten
 On its seaboard run to sinful waste;
 Treasures fitly stored
 For the Olympian board,
 Victor of the World, behold and taste.’

“ Saying this, from forth his little barrel
 Drew he slowly something, and unfurled
 From within a fold of his apparel
 What appeared a knife ; which, deftly twirled,
 Opened it straightway,
 And the Wonder lay
 Plump, before the Victor of the World.

“ Caius Julius put away the ‘ native,’
 Leaving nothing but its fringing beard,
 And the while its succulence afflative
 Through his inmost being breathed, insphered,
 Britain o’er the sea
 Lured resistlessly ;
 Rome and Roman rivals disappeared.

“ Kindled in his eye the gleams that presage
 Fullest light of a resolve new-born ;
 Quick he gave his orderly the message,
 On a leaflet from his tablets torn:
 ‘ Troops embark to-day ;
 Galleys under way
 Punctually at six to-morrow morn.’ ”

“ Permit me,” said Naso, before the company had had time to applaud the verses of Molluscus, “ permit me to read to you the sequel of our friend’s legend—you remember you were obliging enough to read it to me the other day, Molluscus—before you indulge too freely the pleasing reflections it is calculated to excite. You were aware, I dare say, that Cæsar treated Dandorix with gross ingratitude. But perhaps you do not know that the Druid revenged himself with the terrible malediction recorded in the poem I am about to recite :—

“ When the British priest, who oped
To his country’s foes the gate
Found his name was not, as hoped,
Placed upon the Syndicate,

“ Furious at the unworthy hoax,
Stormed the Druid, hoary chief,
With the wrath that often chokes
Men whose plans have come to grief.

“ Conqueror, if the agèd eyes
You with dust contrived to fill,
Failed your treachery to surprise,
They can read the future still.

“ Rome shall scuttle—write that word
In the gore that she has spilt—
Scuttle, hopeless and abhorred,
Deep in ruin as in guilt.

“ Rome, who for the smallest gain
Blood in torrents coldly sheds,
Shall retire with ended reign,
Leaving us our oyster-beds.

““ Then the trade of which your mind
 Studies now to sow the seeds,
 Shall in future be confined
 Solely to our local needs.

““ Prices Cæsar never knew
 His descendants shall dismay ;
 None shall wax the whole world through
 So prohibitive as they.

““ Other oysters shall arise,
 Rivals weak of British fame,
 Flavour giving place to size,
 Magnitude their only claim.

““ Vainly shall your starveling coasts
 Strive our product to excel
 With a puny thing that boasts
 Merely elegance of shell.

““ Till at last you hear, unnerved,
 Fate pronounce her sentence due:
 Natives are for us reserved ;
 Wretched Lucrines wait for you.”

Gloom settled on the faces of those present, with the exception of Molluscus, as Naso concluded his recital. Prices had, in fact, already risen, and they felt in their hearts that the sombre prophecy of this betrayed Druid was but too probably assured of fulfilment.

“ You will not forget the four dozen I am to send by you to Varro,” said Pulcherius to Niger, after a pause. “ You start for Rome next week, do you not? My slave has written the address, I believe. I gave him the order to do so at the time when I commanded him to carve the inscription for Vitalis’s memorial-stone. The fellow is an

expert lapidary, and will have done it neatly. There it is, by the way, wrapped in matting. Let Syrus carry it after you to the poor fellow's quarters ;" for the stars showed the approach of midnight, and Niger was rising to go. " It will be a melancholy satisfaction to him, no doubt, to see that the thing has been properly done."

III.

Niger found the armourer at the point of death. He bent over him and whispered in his ear.

" Vitalis," he said, " I have brought your tombstone. I thought you would like to see it before your death. Slave, display it."

Syrus stripped off the matting and held up the slab. The armourer gazed for a moment on it with a fast-glazing eye, smiled faintly, pressed feebly the physician's hand, and sank back dead.

Niger looked at the tombstone, then at the slave, then at the stone again, and then, despite the solemnity of the occasion, burst into a roar of laughter.

The inscription was in the words and figures following :—

DISCEDENTIS	•	MANIBVS
HAVST • BLVPIL • NIGR •		
HIC • CADVS • XLVIII • OSTR • NATIV •		
LVCI • ÆMIL • VAR •		
TRAENDDV • CREDITVR •		

" Why, you misbegotten progeny of a mule," exclaimed Niger, as soon as he could speak for laughing, " this was

the *address* your master gave you, not the mortuary inscription. You have carved an epitaph for a barrel of oysters!"

IV.

"Useless?" said Naso, after the merriment created by Niger's recital of this incident had subsided. "Not at all. Make me a present of the slab, Pulcherius, and lend me a chisel, and I'll undertake to make the thing useful to future generations, at any rate."

The tool was brought to Naso, and, after a quarter of an hour's industrious hacking at judiciously selected portions of the inscription, it assumed this form:—

DIS		MANIBVS		
HAVST	•	BLVPIL	•	NIGR
HIC		XLVIII		NATI
LVCI	•	ÆMIL	•	VARR
ENDV	•	IT		

"Now," said Naso to Syrus, "take it away, boy, and bury it about a couple of feet underground in your master's garden."

* * * * *

[*Extract from the Journal of the Archaeological Society, 189—.]*

At the meeting of the Society on Friday last a most interesting paper was read by Professor Giglampz, on a Roman tablet recently discovered in the neighbourhood. The inscription was somewhat extensively defaced, but the learning and ingenuity of the Professor have at last triumphed over the difficulties of his task, and there can

now be little doubt in the mind of any one who examines the inscription as conjecturally restored that it is the epitaph of one Haustus Blupilius Niger, who came by his death at Bath at the age of 48, and to whom this memorial was placed by his friend or kinsman Lucius Æmilius Varro.

DIS	MANIBVS
HAVST[I] · BLVPIL[II] · NIGR[I]	
HIC · [SEPVLTI (?)] · XLVIII · [ANNOS] · NATI (?)	
LVCI[VS] · ÆMILI[VS] · VARR[O]	
[PON]ENDV[M] · [CVRAV]IT	

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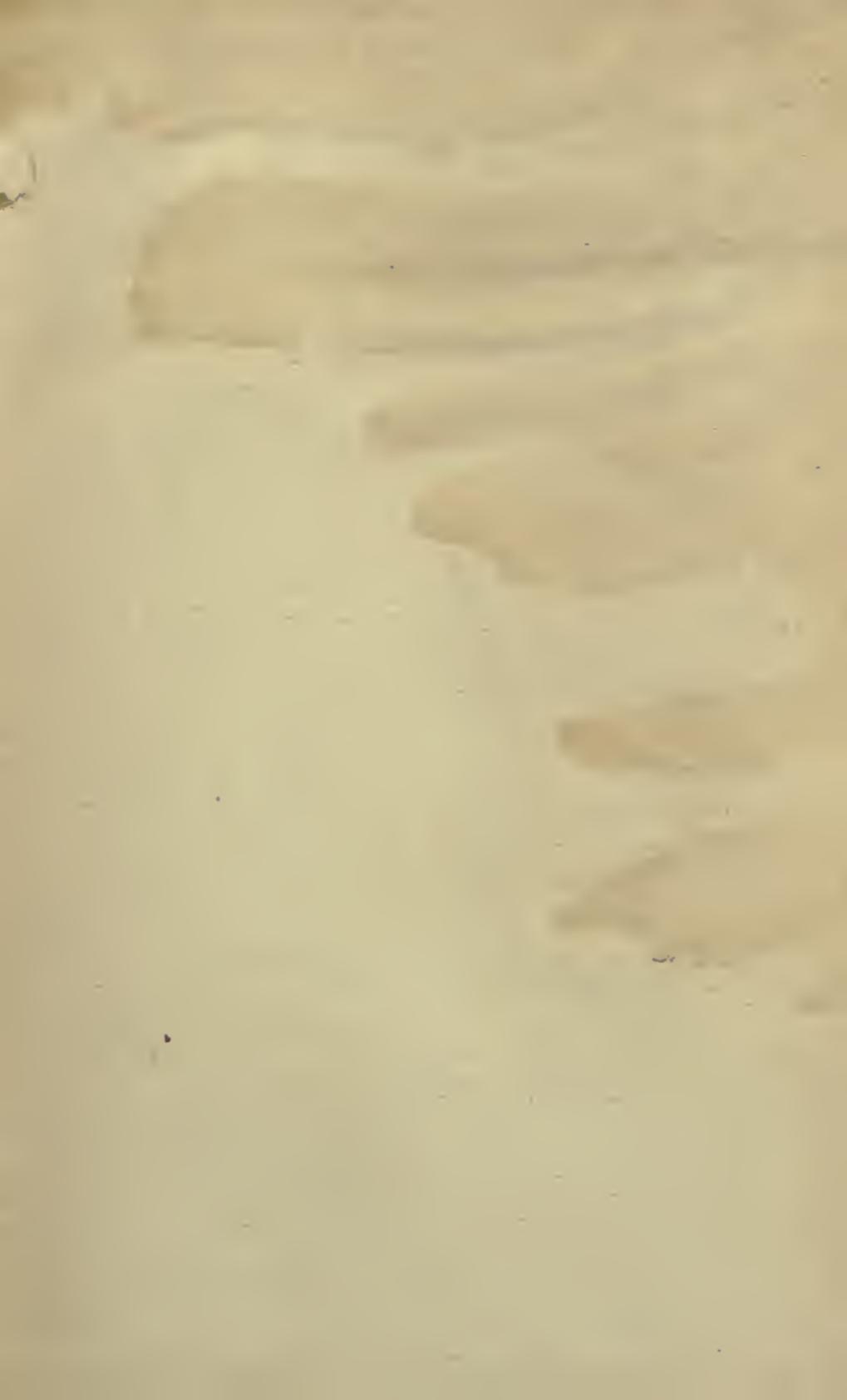
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